

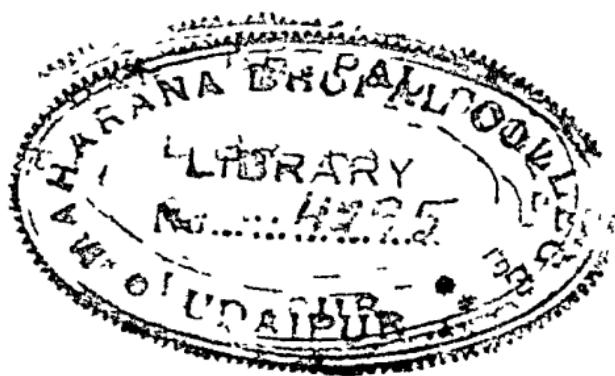
Essays on Literature and Education

*Essays on
Literature and
Education*

By SIR HENRY JONES

*Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the
University of Glasgow*

Edited by Acc. N. 4295
H. J. W. HETHERINGTON



*Hodder and Stoughton
Limited London*

Made and Printed in Great Britain. Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

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Editor's Note

THIS volume was originally intended to complete the recently issued "Life and Letters" of the late Sir Henry Jones. It has been published separately for reasons of convenience.

An examination of Sir Henry Jones's papers revealed the existence of a large number of manuscripts in an advanced state of readiness for publication. Much of this material, however, had been used in one form or another in his Gifford Lectures or in earlier volumes. It was therefore decided to give here only a selection of essays on literary and educational subjects. Three of the papers here included have not hitherto been printed—those on Sir Walter Scott, The Ethical Idea in Shakespeare, and The Dignity of Human Nature. The sources of the four remaining papers are indicated in the text.

Editor's Note

I have to express acknowledgments to Messrs. Williams and Norgate, to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, and to the proprietors of the Round Table for permission to reprint articles appearing in publications under their control.

The manuscripts of the unpublished papers were not in all respects quite complete. I have supplied the lacunæ as the context seemed to require, and have made a few verbal changes and other necessary corrections. Mr. E. H. Jones and Dr. I. Levine have been kind enough to assist me by reading the proofs.

H. J. W. HETHERINGTON.

Sir Walter Scott¹

WHENEVER I venture to address a Scottish audience on a purely Scottish theme, a certain feeling of restraint comes over me, as if I were meddling with a matter not really mine. It is, I think, like the feeling that an adopted child occasionally has on the hearth of his foster-parents. Nothing seems capable of quite making up to him for the fact that his veins are not filled with the family blood: no nurture, no training, no gentleness can make the words Father and Mother and Brother and Sister sound quite naturally upon his lips. Some trait of his disposition, some trick of speech or expression of face, betrays the alien stock.

I am not sure that it is easier to unite oneself with a people from without, or

¹ This essay is undated. It was probably written about 1892.

entirely to enter into the inheritance of their traditions or make their spiritual possessions verily one's own. I owe my dues of nurture to this country : I have sat upon its knees and been nourished on its milk. But I was not borne beneath its heart. And I am not confident that any judgment I may form of Scottish life, or character, or literature, may not be marred by some false accent. And I tender my opinions on Scott, the most perfect type known to me of Scottish manhood, with all deference.

When Scott drew the first of his immortal pictures in his novels, he tells us that a period of sixty years sufficed to connect him with the scenes he described. And yet, so changed were the times, so completely had the earlier customs passed away, that Scott knew no way of uniting the earlier period with his own except by "throwing the force of his narrative upon the characters and passions of the actors." For these are permanent. "The same passions have agitated the human heart, whether it throbbed under the steel corslets of the fifteenth century, the brocaded coat of the eighteenth, or the blue frock

and white dimity waistcoat" of his day.

It is a rather startling fact that the period which separates us from Scott is wider than that which divided him from the stirring times of Fergus and Flora Mac-Ivor. Three generations have arisen and two have wholly passed away since Scott finished his heavy day's labour and laid him down to rest. And how much more than the years have passed away ! We have gained much and we have lost much during these years : more perhaps than we can realize with any clearness ; for a type of civilization has sunk beneath the horizon, and a new constellation is in the heavens.

Let us look back for a moment, and we shall perhaps be knit closer to our hero.

When Scott was born, James Watt was in his early prime of thirty-five ; Goethe and Laplace were youths of twenty-two ; Burns and Schiller were lads of twelve ; Fichte was a child of nine ; Napoleon was a toddling bairn of two ; Hegel and Beethoven were infants in arms. In these men there quietly slept the powers that were to change the Western world in outward form

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and inward meaning. The shafts of Rousseau, tipped with the fire that kindled Europe in one conflagration, had not been sent forth; the spirit of modern democracy lay in soft sleep. Kant had not rung out the knell of the age of dogmatism, or rung in the age of criticism. The horizon of the spiritual world had not received its unspeakable expansion at the hands of the poet-philosophers who succeeded him: Modern science can hardly be said to have been born. To the superficial observer the days of the Highland raids and of tribal violence may seem far away from the settled times of Scott. But he who looks deeper will know that we are separated from Scott by a chasm far more broad and deep. It is like the void expanse that separates two worlds.

In some vital respects the days of Scott are more directly continuous with those of Homer than with our own. The writs of George III ran in the same way as those of King David or Agamemnon; though a little more widely and a little more safely. There were swift riders for times of peace,

and beacon-lights for the stirring events of war. The life at the nation's heart, the edicts of the government, the emotions of the metropolis, crept into the provinces, as slowly as did those of Babylon or Nineveh. Indeed, except at rare intervals, there was in these islands not one life, but many. Each province, each parish, held its own comparatively complete social unit, distinct in customs, traditions, and subtle ways of speech; thinking thoughts of its own, moved with its own interests, and swayed with its own emotions. Within these little social units were the intimate relations of neighbour with neighbour, each individual looking at life from a position all his own, and contributing to the general view of the world the side-light that came from his own social status, trade or profession. The range of life was limited, but it was red-ripe of genuine personal interest to the core.

We look around us to-day and find that all this has passed away like a dream. We are in a new world. The past offers no parallel to it. Our times are quite untried, and no one knows their meaning. For

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instead of the petty social units, each with its own interests, there is one tumultuous, indefinite, mighty, general life. A huge social monster which we cannot without qualification characterize as an organism, and which we would fain not call a machine, has swallowed up the old simple societies, and swept the individual into a vast current as of the open ocean. The interests of the individual, commercial and other, extend he knows not whither, and his fate, for weal or woe, comes from the ends of the earth. And he has learnt his weakness to contend against these mighty forces and to maintain his footing.

He draws to his fellows, unites his weakness with their own. Like comes to like and forms a class. The class strives to form some moderately intelligent view of some single aspect of the general life of the whole state. It has its own interests and its own thoughts, its own perils and its own devices to protect its life. Society, one vast whole, is not a whole. It is stratified from top to bottom. And the general life, so far from being harmonious, is a

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troubled arena where abstract interests collide and clash. Where are now the old individual relations, sometimes kindly, sometimes harsh, but always personal, between master and man? They have become the hard abstractions of capital and labour. Where is the skilled craftsman? He is a part of the industrial machine. Our view of life is as much more poor in elements as it is more general in scope. The successor of Monkbarns does not exchange ideas with the successor of Edie Ochiltree. He meets his fellow-lairds in a London club and derives his views of life from his class. Edie Ochiltree has left the bonnie burn-sides for the city slums; Mrs. Mucklebackit sells her ware to a London fishmonger; and Captain McIntyre hires his moor to a wealthy Cockney; while the Rev. Mr. Blattergowl is not the unique minister of a unique parish, but an indistinguishable cleric with a cleric's view of life. Ruskin has painted the change that our new adventure into the unknown has brought upon the face of nature, rudely breaking into the seclusion of its dells and glens and scaring away peace. But the

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deeper changes in our social life no hand has painted as yet, and the effects on individual life that must inevitably issue therefrom no mind can as yet foresee.

I am not bewailing the change. I am only saying that I do not know the extent of its meaning, and insisting that there are elements in the old life which we dare not lose. Amongst these stands first of all the rich humanity arising from the kindly neighbourliness of the older age. The abstract relations of class to class can never make up to us for the loss of the simple, rich and intimate personal intercourse of man with man.

And it is this which Scott has made immortal to us with a power that is scarcely paralleled elsewhere. It is this which makes him doubly valuable to our age. For he leads us back not only to the clear streams and the open heath, but to a humanity that is pure and simple and true. This, I think, is one of the main secrets of his power, and a paramount characteristic of his art from which all the others follow in due order and by necessary sequence; and on this I shall mainly dwell.

I believe we should find the great mass of competent literary opinion on our side were we to say that Scott shows his genuine power in his prose romances rather than in his poems. I do not feel called upon to depreciate his poetry. Granted, as has been said, that narrative has its own place in poetry, it must be further admitted that Scott's muse offers fresh pictures and good tales told in a sufficiently "direct manner. The verse never falters from beginning to end, the descriptions are faithful and appropriate, and there is an ease, a lightness, a spirit and a vigorous movement—"so that his verse clanks and chimes like sword-sheath on spur." The condemnation of Scott's poetry, Mr. Andrew Lang contends, is a sample of a criticism that is radically bad. He is criticized for not being other than he was, or for not being somebody else—Byron, or Keats, or Wordsworth. "Scott was himself," Lang adds; "he was the Last Minstrel, the latest, the greatest, the noblest of natural poets concerned with natural things. He sang of free, fierce and warlike life, of streams yet rich in salmon,

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and moors not yet occupied by brewers ; of lonely places haunted in the long, grey twilight of the North ; of crumbling towers where once dwelt the Lady of Branksome or the Flower of Yarrow. Nature summed up in him many a past age, a world of ancient faiths, and before the great time of Britain wholly died, to Britain as to Greece, she gave her Homer."

With nearly all of this we should be able to concur. But I think I shall be speaking the experience of you all if I say that in order to mark the excellence of his prose romances we should require other terms than these. A simple experiment will show that they have a different significance for us. For the spirit that has grown weary with the strugge of life or the toil of thought, which longs to escape from its sorrows and bathe in the pure air of a joyous outer life, will always return to the Waverley novels, and scarcely, I think, to the poems. It is not merely that Scott's poems lack the severity or self-restraint or the suggestiveness of the greatest poetry ; nor that he has written few of the musical phrases that linger in

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the ear and dwell around the heart ; nor that he has, in his poems, uttered few thoughts that stir the deepest emotions, or throw light upon the dark places of human experience. It is not from such defects as these in his poetry that we rank it lower than his romances ; but because in the former one element of his genius failed to get expression and gained it in the latter. I refer to his power of depicting character.

Scott in his *Journal* tells us of a man who, however he set his sails, never caught the breeze of public favour. "If I became a baker," said he, "I believe the people would stop eating bread." This was not the case with Scott. Just when his poems were beginning to pall upon the taste and the world was turning to the more pungent and less wholesome verse of Byron, Scott left poetry for prose, and left it for ever as a literary vocation. But I doubt whether the greater success of Byron was really the determining motive which brought about the change. Nor must we be misled by the manly generosity of Scott's mind in yielding the field so courteously to another

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and in crowning his rival's head with laurels. There was not a man in Scotland less capable of giving up his point than Scott, had he cared to maintain it. But he did not care. And the very fact that Scott gave up poetry, gave it up, be it remembered, when he was neither unsuccessful nor disappointed, gave it up with apparently less regret than he parted with Abbotsford, or with his dogs, shows that poetry never was one of the deep necessities of his nature. The truth is that he had found in *Waverley* a larger and freer utterance than was possible for him within the limits of verse; and that his metrical tales were really little more than his unconscious apprenticeship to his true vocation. For in his prose romances he could fling his whole force upon the characters; and in his case, as in that of Shakespeare to a still greater degree, it is the creation of characters which marks the highest reach of his artistic power. It is this creative quality exercised on men and women that, more than aught else, gives to Scott that easy and unapproachable supremacy amongst the novel-

ists which Shakespeare holds amongst the poets. Speaking generally, it may be said that the interest of Scott's poems turns upon descriptions of natural scenery, and the events of battle and the chase. That is to say, the poetry is epic poetry, and the epic has as its special aim and purpose the representation of some single great action, which is heroic in quality and significant in its consequences. In narrating the action, the epic more or less incidentally describes character; we know Achilles and Ulysses as well as we know Pericles or Themistocles, or even better. But the revelation of character is accidental and accessory to the main purpose. This distinguishes the epic from the drama and the novel, whose main interest is in the development of character by means of the action. It is only a natural consequence that when we think of the poems of Scott it is some fair vision of a lonely landscape, or the stirring events of some field of battle which arise in our mind. But to think of his novels is to see a wonderful procession of living phantoms pass across the stage. It is to *see* Caleb Balder-

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stone and Andrew Fairservice, Dugald Dalgetty and Dandie Dinmont, Meg Merrilies and Mause Headrigg, Elspeth of Craigburnfoot and Jeanie Deans. It is only in *Quentin Durward* that the romance has the same quality as the poems, and the outward incidents crowd out the characters. And even there the pictures of the French monarch and the old Scottish soldier of fortune stand out clearer than any character in the poems.

It is only another aspect of the same distinction between the poems and the romances which comes into view when we refer to the comparative absence of humour in the former and its exuberance in the latter. For in the best of his novels Scott's humour overflows all banks.

Now I am not going to attempt to define the qualities of humour or to estimate its influence on the literary art of Scott. That man himself lacks the quality of humour who strives to analyse the impalpable. He who has an ear for this kind of literary music knows full well how exquisite is its delight; and he who has it not will not

understand much explanation. Humour, however, indicates this, at any rate, that the author is complete master of his subject, and that in the full exercise of his best powers of heart and head there is the rest of perfect motion. Scott's insight into character is never more deep, his symmetric strength never more beautiful, his manly heart never more gentle, than when it is filled with laughter. It is in the novels, and in the delineation of character, which rises into humour only in his greatest novels, that we have the true revelation of Scott's massive manhood. Here, and not in the poems, is his true self.

In throwing emphasis upon Scott's power of creating character as the most perfect form of his art, I am not able to agree with those who would condemn his plots. Confining myself to his best work—as criticism that is born of sympathy, and therefore alone just, always will do—I may say that hardly any of his plots are *artistically* improbable. I admit that the prose understanding can find in them no scarcity of improbable incidents. In *Guy Mannering*,

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for instance, Meg Merrilies is to all intents and purposes both omnipresent and omniscient : so is Norna, in *The Pirate*. Taken as they stand, their appearances on the scene, always pat to the occasion, are most improbable ; and the laws of space and time are set at open defiance. But I think it can be maintained that these improbabilities do not jar upon the artistic taste of the reader, however they may affect his more prosy parts. And the reason is not difficult to assign. Scott throws such a romantic light over the whole scene, and so touches the personages with magic and mystery—he creates such a psychological atmosphere, as we say nowadays—that the laws of the ordinary world of prose no longer hold. Like Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, Scott, with the silent smoothness of his magic, translates his readers into a romantic world, and the critic who would set up the batteries of the understanding in that region loses his toil and only covers himself with smoke. It is poor criticism that takes its start by being entirely out of focus, and tries to test the world of

romance by the laws of the world of prose.

I maintain, then, that the true critic will not find bad plots in any of Scott's greater novels. Indeed, I know nothing in all literature that surpasses in consummate skill of plot the closing chapters of *Guy Mannering*. When the crisis arrives, all the great characters in the play are on the boards together, and the plot rushes to its solution with overpowering rapidity and impulse from the moment that Harry Bertram has seen again the ruins of the old castle of his childhood.

But the power and artistic value of the plots of Scott are not due to any dull and laborious realism, or mechanical correspondence with the ordinary world. Their truth lies, rather, in the very completeness of the fiction. He never lets go his hold of the realm of wonders, and the ordinary world is not allowed to intrude into the sphere of romance so as to bring in disharmony and incongruity. And this arises in the main from his firm grasp of character. Character and circumstance exactly suit each other, as they do in Shakespeare's plays. In fact, the plot springs out of the

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characters. Scott's living intuition of the actors comes first. He sets them upon the stage together and stands aside. There is no prevision of the story or fore-ordained plot. Scott knew too well how living men and women create their own world, call up their own fate, weave their own destiny. It is true that in some of the novels, and especially in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, we are made to feel from the first that a dark and remorseless destiny hangs above the agents, like the Nemesis of the Greek plays. The setting of the novel is the brooding storm, as that of *The Antiquary* is the cheerful sunshine. Nevertheless, the fate is not an *external* necessity, but has its root within the agents—in their pride, their self-will and imprudent oblivion of the laws of a peaceful life. Given characters as poor and proud as Ravenswood, as imperious and wilful as Lucy's mother, then it follows that the tragedy *must* come: the incidents of the plot are mere expressions of the passions within. At the root of the whole of his work we always find, in the last resort, Scott's sagacious understanding of men and

women, springing not more from the keenness of his intellectual vision than from his large heart, and really the expression of his own massive manhood.

Shall we now turn to Scott's method of presenting these personages that he knew so well and saw so clearly ? For in this respect he seems to me to sit alone amongst the English novelists. Thackeray has pathos and pity, simplicity and veracity ; George Eliot had learning and a philosophy and a creed and an analytic mind ; Hawthorne, in some respects surpassing both of these, could vivisect the very soul, and lay bare the subtle fibres of memory and association, of hereditary creeds and past crimes, seizing the nerves of the soul with the forceps and lifting them one by one into view. But these writers are, after all, not like Scott, nor of the same race as he. He does not need to analyse and subtilize like Hawthorne, to moralize and mourn over the pathos and pettiness of human snobs with Thackeray ; nor to come before us armed and encumbered with a panoply of learning like George Eliot in her later days. He

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speaks with the spontaneity of Shakespeare, and is as natural and free. He has even something of the wealth of Shakespeare, for in neither case can we feel that much writing could bring exhaustion. The flesh might fail, as it did with Scott, and the mind, ridden by care, might wear out its instrument; but intrinsically his genius is as fresh and spontaneous, and pure and inexhaustible, as the spring which draws its waters from the depths of the earth.

Scott, at his best, is supremely natural; and although one can hardly say in exact terms what that implies, we know that it means a great deal. For with nature genuinely at a man's back, so that he appears to be only the vehicle of her thoughts and the voice of her spirit, there is little he cannot perform, whether in the realm of poetry, or of science, or of philosophy. It is only by her immediate help that genuine creation can take place, and living things spring into being, and they are separated by a distance not to be measured from all that is mechanical and dead.

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And it is only in his characters that this supreme gift of naturalness and spontaneity reveals itself in Scott. We find that gift in far higher degree in Shakespeare, I need hardly say. Scott has no female character we can even name with Cordelia, or Imogen, or Rosalind, or Beatrice. His art is indefinitely less rich, more limited, especially on the side of the variety and beauty of his women. Nevertheless, his greatest creations have the same quality as Shakespeare.

It is not easy to describe that quality ; but let us press as near the meaning as we can.

In the first place, then, they *are* creations. And creations have no history : we never see them in the making, but they stand before us all at once in clear light, palpable to the touch, and real, moving about their concerns in the real world. They are not obtained at the end of a process like a chemical precipitate. They are not due to an analysis of human nature, like George Eliot's, nor are they constituted of abstract conceptions and general tendencies bound together into a kind of clumsy

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cohérence. On the contrary, they are, *in the second place*, individual, and one, as a living thing is individual and one; and individuality is always inexhaustible. We can set forth the motives of George Eliot's characters one by one and enumerate their springs of action; but such is the complexity that hides beneath the simplicity of a living thing that we can never exhaust its qualities. Can a mother tell *all* about the little lump of humanity that sleeps on her knees? Is not the living thing always so rich in traits that it baffles all science?

Analysis fails us, in fact, where the living come before us. We only know that just as it would occasion us no least surprise were we to come against Falstaff tumbling out of a London tavern, so we should experience no shock were we to meet the old blue-gown, Edie Ochiltree, cheerily tramping along a country lane on a spring morning. As it requires some effort of sober reason, or of the prose intellect, to prevent us from looking for the grave of Othello and Desdemona in Cyprus, or to convince ourselves that Shakespeare's Cordelia never was in

France, nor Imogen in the cave, nor Hamlet in Denmark ; that there never was a Rosalind in Arden, nor a Beatrice in the Court ; so we have almost to do violence to ourselves in order to realize that Dandie Dinmont was an airy nothing, who never led Mustard and Pepper, young and old, to the chase, or that Dominie Sampson was only an unsubstantial essence, the phantom creation of an artist's brain. He has not read Scott well if Dandie Dinmont and Dugald Dalgetty, Pleydell and Davie Deans, are not as real to him as Scott and Burns and Jeffrey, Pitt or Fox or Burke. And yet there are no elaborate descriptions of these persons, or analytic accounts of mixed motives. Scott sketches the outer man for us by a touch here and there, and then he lets him speak and act : and it is done with such truthfulness and native sincerity, whether conscious or unconscious, that we know each character as we know our friends, by his terms of speech and his sentiments. You cannot miss Richie Monplies with his pride and honesty, independence and fidelity, impracticableness and shrewdness ; he is the

Scottish metaphysical working man, with his national fondness for learned speech and long words, dogmatic, pragmatic, didactic, moralizing, dour and given to endless contradiction which never admits a fault and always puts you in the wrong. And haven't we the very truth and essence of the Scottish guid-wife in Mrs. Dandie Dinmont, with her mother's heart and thrifty industry as she presides over, or rather mingles in, the chaotic plenty of a Scottish farm-house, and bakes oatcakes and bannocks. Then comes Cuddie Headrigg as the veritable embodiment of the Scottish ploughman. He is slow in his movements both of mind and body, and he knows that theological distinctions surpass his powers. But he is "aye gleg at meal-time," and gleg, too, to cover his homely shrewdness with an appearance of stupidity, and he can, on a crisis, distinguish with effect between the Scottish Covenant and the Covenant of Works. He has learnt on the stormy hearth of his "auld jaud of a mither" to jouk and let the lave go by; and he could always hold his quiet way even although he was trans-

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mitted as a humble subject from one petticoat government to another. “I hae aye had some carline or quean or another, to gar me gang their gate instead o’ my ain. There was first my mother, then there was Leddy Margaret didna let me ca’ my soul my ain—than my mother and her quarrelled and pued me twa ways at once, as if ilk ane had an end o’ me, like Punch and the Deevil rugging about the Baker at the fair, and now I hae gotten a wife, and she’s like to tak the guiding o’ me a thegither.”

It is curious to note what a sense of intimacy Scott creates between us and his personages. We regard Cuddie and Edie and Monk barns, and many more, amongst our most familiar acquaintances, and we know them better than our neighbours or fellow-workers. I find in this, too, a notable characteristic of Scott’s art. He makes the abnormal normal, and the distant near; while some writers, amongst whom Hawthorne is conspicuous, make the normal abnormal. Hawthorne, in his *House of the Seven Gables*, seizes upon a musty, mouldering old mansion, with equally musty and

mouldering humanity inside it, and invests every stone of the building, and every thought of its dwellers, with a mystery. The sins of the past have eaten into the very plaster and partitions, till the house itself is diseased and cursed. The perfectly normal, quiet family, as it appears to the ordinary eye, and the old mansion, have, in his hands, turned into a mysterious dark blotch which the sunshine cannot illumine.

But Scott makes the mysterious natural, and makes the scenes and manners of a distant age pass before us in the sunny light of his own bright imagination. Our intimacy with his characters is, I have no doubt, due to the reflexion of his own warm sympathy. For he looked at everything with generous frankness and open-eyed manliness. He was always on easy footing with all men and women of all grades and always drew out their best, as the spring sunshine lures out the flowers amongst the grass. "He aye spake tell us," says one of his poorer neighbours, "as if we were his bluid-relations." There are few things more intrinsically beautiful in themselves, or which shed

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a more beautiful light on Scott's manhood, than the loyalty of his old domestics to him after his great calamity—his dignified old butler preferred the menial office of a common servant to the service of another master; and the picture of his old coachman ploughing the bents with the carriage-ponies is one of the great pathetic pictures of history.

The intimacy, the consciousness of brotherhood, I may further remark, is more close in the case of Scott's humbler characters than in any others. It is, as Bagehot has noted, one of the rare merits of Scott's fiction that it is at its best in delineating humble life. There are three pictures of humble life in *The Antiquary* which are not easily paralleled elsewhere even in his own works.

Its mean, gossiping, thriftless and sordid aspect is shown us in Mrs. Mailseller's post office; its pity and pathos and homely grandeur in the hut of Mucklebackit where Steenie's coffin lies, and on the beach when the old man tries in vain to mend the shattered boat. But there is one other scene, still of humble life, which rises still

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higher. Indeed, I know no passage in the whole of Scott altogether comparable to it. I refer to the description of the visit of the Antiquary and his nephew and old Ochiltree to Elspeth of Craigburn-foot at the hour of her death. Here we have not only that mingling of pathos and humour which draws both smiles and tears, but a certain majesty and high seriousness that lifts beauty into sublimity. This scene, and, I may almost say, this scene alone, in Scott moves in the same way as some of Shakespeare's greatest. There is the same combination of apparently incongruous elements as in the storm scene in *Lear*, the same resolution of discords into a vast harmony, which is always the greatest triumph of art. There is also something in this scene that awes the spirit into silence. For he brings us face to face with the elemental powers of the moral world. He leads us along the limiting line of human existence where it holds by things unseen; and for a moment he draws away the veil from the awful face of Fate, and shows us the human will in the grasp of its own history: for *that is Fate.*

In reading Scott it is generally easy to miss this deeper view of life. Carlyle himself missed it, from a strange want of sympathy in this rarest of critics. And he is in consequence not sparing in his strictures upon Scott's outwardness and conventionality in morals and religion. He was "the Spiritual comfit-maker, and confectioner, of his age. A sublime sweety-man." The Waverley novels were not "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up, or elevating, in any shape." "The sick heart will find no healing there, the darkly-struggling heart no guidance, the heroic that is in all men, no divine, awakening voice." "They do not found themselves on deep interests, but on comparatively trivial ones ; not on the perennial, perhaps not even on the lasting."

What truth is there in these statements ? First, it is true—and I shall speak of it later—that Scott never was a professed moralist ; and, for my own part, I count him not much the worse for that. Scott had not been led into the solitude to wrestle with moral and religious doubt. He was

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too healthy in soul for any of the Wertherisms of his age to cling to him ; and he was too interested in the past to feel the breath of the future or to recognize that the old world was breaking up around him. Again, Scott, *as an artist*, was not deeply touched with the discords of life, its miseries, evils and contradictions, and, *speaking generally*, we may say that he has not striven to treat *moral* tragedies. There is no scene in his romances which, in point of moral quality, we can set side by side with the closet scene in *Hamlet*. Scott does not place his personages, as, e.g., Hawthorne and George Eliot do, in the solemn and sublime setting of the world of spirit. He looks at things as they are and does not hold them in the stern light of that which ought to be. In other words, he is not amazed and struck into silence by the sense of a lost good, a good never realized but ever standing in condemning majesty above even the best of man's aims and achievements. There is no cry of helplessness, because there is not this sense of the highest. We do not hear him exclaim like the Breton mariner, " My

boat is so small, and thy ocean so great."

But what then? Are we to condemn him as a confectioner? I do not think so.

Scott, in fact, was an artist and not a moralist, a painter and not a teacher. This is the natural and, at first sight, the just defence of him. In this he is distinguished from his three greatest successors, Thackeray, George Eliot and Hawthorne, and particularly from the two last named. In this he is so much *greater* than they are. His instinct preserved him from attempting to deal with matters too solemn and high for him. Reflexion on the problems of human life destroys the artistic ease and spontaneity and freedom of George Eliot and Hawthorne. The personages are there, not purely for their own sakes, but for the sake of illustrating the conflict of some greater power that works behind them. They are there to represent the working out of some problem—a problem of the individual conscience in the case of Hawthorne, some social problem, as a rule, with George Eliot. The atmosphere of the novels of these two is never quite clear and the figures are

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never quite distinct, objective, in the real outer world engaged on their own business, like the real men and women of Scott. The mist of the past hangs round the characters of Hawthorne. Or, to alter the figure, the whole action takes place in the Valley of the Shadow of some inscrutable Destiny. Some silent power spreads its dusky wings over the whole of Hawthorne's country, and we sigh for pure and free air. George Eliot, and especially in her later novels, sins still more deeply against true art whose interest is ever in the individual. Daniel Deronda is not a man but a scion of the Jewish race; and Tito Melema less an individual than an Italian tinged through and through with Greek craft. The historical scene, the social problem, the positivist's philosophy, inundate the picture—the background blurs the main figures; the universal elements encroach upon the individual; the moral and social reflexions destroy the distinctness and definiteness which are indispensable to art. In fact, in the novels of George Eliot we have neither the truest art nor the highest morality; and find neither unalloyed plea-

sure in beauty nor the healthy impulse which the view of the good always gives. She has attempted too much and *mingled* morality and art to the detriment of both.

The reflective species of literature is always less pleasing than the artistic ; and I think that, apart from the marvellous purity and beauty of Hawthorne's prose and the subtlety of his analysis—qualities in which Scott is not for a moment to be compared with him—and a certain tragic breadth of reflexion on human life—as distinguished from the lives of men and women—in George Eliot, we would not be drawn to them. This, however, is equivalent to the confession that George Eliot and Hawthorne [are great from other reasons than their art. They are great otherwise than as novelists, or painters of human life and manners. The novel is a vehicle for their thoughts and does not exist for its own sake. But it does so exist for Scott. He is first, almost without a second (except, perhaps, for Fielding) in this walk of literature. But what of those moral elements which Carlyle misses ? Carlyle, we agree, is

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so far right. There is no quarrel between art and morality. If the mere combination of them in an outward manner mars both, there is, on the other hand, a way of reaching down to the moral facts of man's life through the individual, a way of *not* stopping, as Scott does, at the buff belt and old armour, but of touching the perennial universal in the individual, along which the mighty spirit of Shakespeare alone has moved. Shakespeare never moralizes like Thackeray, nor sets himself to solve problems like George Eliot and Hawthorne. Nevertheless, in him, far more than in Scott, we feel that the problems are there; the universal elements stand clear and distinct in the deep workings of the passions of the individual. Thus Scott falls below Shakespeare as plainly as he rises above the others. He portrays human life, ever ordinary in its workings, with consummate power; but he misses, through a healthiness which is also a limitation, the great elemental powers of thought and passion in human life.

But while thus far I go with Carlyle, I dissent from him most strongly in his refusal

Sir Walter Scott

to accord its own place, and a very great place, to Scott's work. True, Scott works *in extenso* rather than *in intenso*; he heals none of the deeper wounds of life. When grief lies on the soul like a thick pall, silencing speech and almost numbing feeling, we cannot read Scott. We must turn to Shakespeare, or Wordsworth and his reflective followers, or, still better, to the Bible. These are the companions of our spirits when they are most deeply stirred by the great facts of life. But man is not always in sublime moods. These are rare; while the petty ailments of the spirit, as of the body, are ever with us. And for these there is no physician in literature to be compared to Scott. Great as is the power of reflexion, indispensable as doubt and criticism and despairing questioning must be, there are few of these reflective writers, none except the very greatest, whom we would not be more wise, as well as more willing, to spare than Scott. At any rate, I know of no one whose writings are so like the pure air of the mountain, so health-giving, so like the great gifts of nature

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herself, which seem to come of themselves and to have no ulterior motive and no purpose except beauty and healing. Without them, as without these gifts of nature, there would be no release from the strain of endeavour, no unbending of the bow, and therefore no verve and elasticity in our strength. No one more than Scott, no one perhaps so much, serves morality so well in this indirect and unconscious manner. Had Carlyle himself been less uniformly serious, less conscious of his own prophetic mission, readier to remember with Hegel that the good which is working in the world is eternal and has therefore plenty of time, he would have been a greater writer and a greater moral force. Hurry in morality, like hurry in business, destroys its own end, creates a spirit of injustice towards the past, impatience towards fellow-workers, and an uncharitableness of disposition which is never helpful. When Christian rushed past Faithful he fell, and Faithful had to help him. None commits greater mistakes than the reformer in a hurry. We need, even in working for a better state of the world,

Sir Walter Scott

some consciousness of its present beauty and love for it as it is, some power at times to take pleasure in men and women as they are, to love them with all their faults upon their heads. Bunyan had his land of Beulah for the wearied pilgrims, where the air was very sweet. And in a less spiritual sense, but one not less important for the good of man, we may say that Scott's novels give the lover of literature of high art the same rest. He is a green oasis in the sandy desert of literary ambition, a man who wrote because his heart was full of love of the past ; a spirit heroic in its health, a very brother, though of larger thews. He is the greatest figure in Scottish literature : "the one massive and complete literary type of his race."

*Tennyson*¹

I CANNOT accept the honour which the Council of the Academy conferred upon me in asking me to take part in the celebration of the Centenary of Tennyson's birthday, without suggesting that I am grateful for their confidence. When they sent me the invitation I was much surprised, and I have been sorry ever since that I accepted it. It might have been better for a student of Philosophy, asked to speak of a great poet amongst learned men, to say to them what Lynette said to Arthur when he gave her quest to Gareth :

"Fie on thee, King ! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."

But it occurred to me that what the Council desired on this occasion was not the critical estimate of the scholar, or expert in the

¹ A paper read before the British Academy at its Annual Meeting on October 27, 1909.

Art of Literature, but some expression of the significance of the last undisputed national poet of England for the multitudes of simple men and women who have sought much, and found much, in his poems. From that point of view the burden of my task seemed bearable. Sharing the common mind, and pretending to no other equipment than it possesses, I thought I might try to speak for it.

And yet there is a sense in which no man can speak for another of the things of Art. The appeal which Beauty makes and the response which it awakens differ for every man. Every genuine experience of a beautiful thing is unique, and a borrowed appreciation of it is naught. I do not mean, however, that the realm of the Fine Arts is lawless, or that the feeling of beauty is a matter of caprice. The Canons of Art are as universal as the Laws of Logic. But they are also as general. As no Logic ever can set forth all the reasons for which the simplest belief is held to be true, so no adequate account will ever be given of the grounds on which a poem or painting

is held to be beautiful. The premises of the artistic judgment cannot be numbered. They are the intertwined totality of the elements of the personality of the literary critic himself, informed and suffused by the whole of his literary experience. So that, even for the same individual, judgments of taste are never twice the same in all respects. Personality, which is another name for experience, is like the gateway of Camelot, a living thing which changes. Its

Dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings,
Move, seethe, twine and curl.

Nevertheless, the world's judgment of the great things of Art stands singularly stable and secure. That variable, inconsistent, ill-informed, elusive, captious, and unreasoning thing which we call the public taste, if it is given time to follow its own blind ways, somehow sifts the subtle qualities of the poets, and, on the whole, arrives at sound conclusions. The process is very mysterious, and far too wayward and complex to be satisfactorily explained. We only

Tennyson

know that it is carried on by many minds, and carried on the more successfully the more each mind is sincere to its own findings. As the wind, passing through the forest, makes each particular leaf vocal in its own way, and brings forth a multitudinous music that is *one*, so the greater poets set free the power of the beauty of the world to play upon the souls of men innumerable, and awaken, soon or late, the same universal murmur of glad assent.

The unanimity of their satisfaction in a great poet is not due, I think, or not due to any great degree, to the influence of the official literary critics upon a docile public mind. The critics themselves are by no means unanimous. The history of criticism makes the strangest reading. Even in the case of Tennyson, the vicissitudes of whose fame have been far less striking than is usual with great poets, the literature of criticism awakens reflection. Travelling through this wide waste-land, I was almost led to believe that there is one region where caprice is more unconfined and the rule of chaos more unrestrained than in that

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other region, in which Philosophy is the innocent and long-suffering victim. I can almost pardon what has been said of Hegel, now that I know what has been said of Tennyson.

Besides, even if the critics were unanimous, which is really quite unthinkable, the public mind is not so docile as we are prone to think. It is apt in literature, as in philosophy or politics, to lead its leaders; and if it enjoys a poet, it neglects his critics. The ultimate verdict of the world is not reached by weighing the opinions of the experts, and striking the mean between adulation and detraction. It does not come as the result of disputation. The function of critical argumentation is narrow even in the departments of learning where the clash of argument and counter-argument must be heard. The false, even in philosophy or theology, is rarely refuted by direct disproof. Error is not uprooted as a rule; it is pushed aside by new growths of truth, often in fields which look remote enough. Theological systems may be rendered obsolete by natural science; and false opinions are

Tennyson

left to wither like forgotten household plants.

In poetry, the function of criticism and argumentative disputation is still narrower. Criticism is so different in purpose and spirit from the æsthetic appreciation of poetry, that I do not think it decides the destiny of the poets. Criticism does not call to the throne; for a king whom we can look in the face is not altogether royal. It is love that crowns. The critics have their own place and their own worth, but it is not *their* voice which has summoned Tennyson to

To music with his Order and the King.^{move}

It is the voice of the scholar, it is true, but not when he is engaged in criticism. It is even more the voice of unnumbered men and women who do not read criticisms much, who know nothing of the Canons of Art, but who have found in the poet what they sorely needed. Tennyson spoke for England, when confusion had fallen upon its heart,

In that close mist and cryings for the light;

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and the gratitude of England to him is just and deep.

I am inclined to treat this uncritical criticism, this methodless method of the unreflective multitude, which cannot read its own heart and only knows that it is being moved, with great respect. At a time when detraction is somewhat prevalent, I want to stand by the verdict of the common mind. By occasional reference to it, I think that the scholar or man of letters himself may find his judgments stayed and steadied. He will be saved from irrelevancies by its directly practical ways. As a critic, he cannot and should not avoid comparing poet with poet, and therefore he must feel the limits of every poet in turn. He must tell us how he cannot hear in Tennyson's verse the majestic roll of Milton's music; or how he misses the direct virility of Burns, or the profuse intensity of Browning's tumultuous energy; how Tennyson's art is three parts artifice; or how he was not the Ariel of song like Shelley, and had not the young Greek face of Keats; or how there is not to be found in him the

solitary expanse and the bleak magnificence of Wordsworth's everlasting thought. But nothing of all this matters for the common mind, nor for the scholar himself when he reads, not to judge, but to enjoy. *Then* he is glad that Tennyson was himself, and not Wordsworth or another. For his fine ear detects in Tennyson's voice some quality never heard before ; and he knows that the great choir which chants our gorgeous literature is richer for his presence.

It is for this new, positive quality that the true ear always listens ; it is for this the lover of what is beautiful cares, and not for defects or limitations. When a man is on the quest for beauty—and when else should he speak of poetry ?—he has no use for negation. He will have no commerce at all with that which does not please. He would close the door of his Palace of Art against things which are not fair ; and if by any chance they enter, he turns their faces to the wall, and lets them be. It is not the inharmonious strains that linger in the musician's ear ; nor do they form the o'ercome of the song he lilts within his heart.

Man is very much a pragmatist. He values things for their use. His interest in negation is really very narrow, and always an accident of something positive. In no department of his spiritual enterprise does he draw inspiration from the flaws or the dishonour of the world. "Yea, I know it," was the answer which Merlin gave to Vivien when she spoke of Lancelot's commerce with the Queen ; "*Let them be.*" Merlin was wise, and knew Nature's own method, which is to grow the grain and forget the chaff. And human nature, betray it as men and women will, is still part of the generous nature of the wider world. It sifts the true from the false by a method which is positive. It dwells with what it loves, and it forgets the rest.

Holding converse with a changing world and clashing with its circumstance, men catch glimpses of their own needs, and amongst these, of their need for that which is true, and right, and beautiful. And if they discover anywhere the objects which will satisfy these needs they show a lasting, if reluctant gratitude to those who bring them ; and

bear late wreaths of laurel to their graves.

I would confirm gladly the admiration of the few and critical of Tennyson's "unborrowed perfections"; but my task is both humbler and higher. I would, on this occasion, express the gratitude of the many and unsophisticated readers to the poet, whose thoughts were their own thoughts about their own English scenes and English life. For Tennyson lived in their world: he was tried by their difficulties, moved by their fears, acquainted with their griefs, troubled by their dim questionings; and they found solacement in the music of his verse. I doubt if any poem ever written has soothed the sorrow of so many hearts as *In Memoriam*. The qualities which the Aesthetic Art demands are in his poems: the charm of the equal yoking of thought and word, "for there never was a finer ear than Tennyson's, nor more command of the keys of language";¹ and surely the shy beauties of nature never played on a more sensitive instrument than his soul or broke into more exquisite strains. But

¹ See Emerson's *English Traits*.

besides these things of which it is mere platitude to speak, there fell from his hands many other kinds of good gifts, scattered by the way but precious all the same—faith in the face of doubt, hope contending with despair, inspiration to all gentleness in life. I hold it no wonder that his age proclaimed him king, or that “only once in the history of our literature in verse, and once in prose, has there been seen a royal suzerainty maintained over an entire epoch by a single writer to be compared to that by which Alfred Tennyson has dominated the Victorian poetry.¹ His age did well to submit to his yoke and yield itself to his power. It may be true that other times have brought other needs, and that the ideals of the Victorian age are in many respects no longer ours, yet I do not think that the hour has come for Tennyson’s power to pass.

Tho’ some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become

¹ Frederic Harrison’s *Tennyson; Ruskin, Mill.*

* A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep.

It will be said, no doubt, that to prize a poet on such grounds as these is to esteem him for qualities which are alien to his art. Poetry, it will be said,—and truly,—is sovereign within her own realm.

Singing and murmuring in her feastful mirth,
Joying to feel herself alive,
Lord over Nature, Lord of the visible earth,
Lord of the senses five.

What has *she* to do with the brawlings of truth and falsehood, or the strife of right and wrong ? *

I take possession of man's mind and deed.
I care not what the sects may brawl.
I sit as God holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.

The value of a work of Art, it is justly held, depends entirely upon its beauty. A picture is not better for being a portrait; nor a poem because it has a religious subject, or conveys moral lessons; nor is “a hurdy-gurdy in tune because it plays the Old Hundredth.” Art, Morality, Knowledge, Religion, are all sovereign in their own

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domain, and each of them amply authorizes itself.

But this truth is often misunderstood and put to false uses. It is thought that their sovereignty can be secured only by confining each of them to a restricted domain into which the others may not enter. Truth, Beauty, Goodness, are said to deal with different objects as well as to appeal to different faculties and to aim at different purposes. They are separate aspects of our experience, relative to different phases of reality, all of them abstract, one-sided, and incomplete; and they "come together only in the Absolute."

I wish to admit their independence, but to deny their rivalry and mutual exclusion. It seems to me that the dominion of every one of these Supreme Arts of Life is not only absolute, but without bounds. There is no region anywhere which Art may not invade and make its own—not that which Science rules with an iron hand, nor that in which the elemental powers of right and wrong wage their endless warfare, nor that where Religion dwells amongst green pastures

watered with springs which never fail. The ideals of man's best life overlap. Every created thing belongs to them all alike. It is an object of knowledge to him who seeks the truth ; a means of learning what is right to him who aims at the moral good ; and it may also be fraught with music for the poet. Facts which are fragile, transient, fleeting as the dance of daffodils, can enter into many contexts, every one of which is permanent. They may illustrate a Law of Nature for science, or the Imperatives of Duty for the moralist ; and they may be made a joy for ever by the poet. Nor is it otherwise with the things of the world of mind—with the play of social forces, the growth and decay of polities and constitutions, the strife of creeds and systems. These two are materials for poetry, and for all the arts of life. The True, the Beautiful, and the Good are like different voices in one harmony. Each sings its own part, and follows the windings of the common theme in its own way ; and the music is all the richer.

And it is *one*. Beauty, Truth, and Good-

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ness are abstract, it is true, and not one of them *is* the whole. But they are all an attempted rendering of the whole. They come together in the Absolute : nay, they come together in the Soul of man. They convey to it the many-sided glory of the world, which is majestic at once in its rightness and truth and beauty. There is no way which man can devise to translate the language of the one into the language of the others ; nothing but poetry can render the truth of poetry, and nothing but doing the right can render the meaning of morality. Nay, we cannot make the Fine Arts take the place of one another—not poetry that of music, nor music that of painting or sculpture. The experience of each is *finally* unique. But though the rational spirit of man cannot translate their speech into a common tongue, or invent a spiritual Esperanto, still it can comprehend them all. The quarrel of Art and Morality, of Poetry and Philosophy, is but a foolish brawl between their ragged retainers. They themselves are most at one when they are most themselves.

The soul of man is like a walled city,

immured at first within itself, ignorant of the meaning of the wider world, callous to its beauty, selfishly exclusive of its larger purposes. But the powers which compass it round about are friendly, though it knows them not. The great rich universe sits in perpetual siege against it, as if resolved in one way or another to break down its isolation and flood it with its bounty. If the portals of reason are closed, and the engines of argument and armed proof fail to force the gates, the beauty of the arts may win a way, like the evening mists which moved up the streams of Eden, bringing with them a Good needed but not sought. The linked concord of music, the glory of form and colour, the sweet fragrance of the poet's verse, may succeed where the concatenated necessity of reasoning fails.

Are there not many thousands of men and women whose very life rests on moral convictions and religious beliefs which they cannot defend by conscious reasoning ? They can follow the arguments of the sceptic, for the incoherencies of experience are many and plain, and the way of negation is easy. But

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they cannot answer them. The dogmatic creeds seem to them to browbeat reason, and they are not satisfied ; while the constructive systems of the great philosophers, who testify to the spiritual nature of the world, sound in their ears like jargon and look like jugglery. These men and women have sought and found, and they have rightly sought and found, in the great religious poets of the last century, what they could not find elsewhere. Had it not been for Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson above all others, they would be found dwelling in a world of eclipse and paralysis, neither able to find a faith nor to do without one. Sitting

by the poisoned streams of life

Waiting for the morrow that shall free them from the strife.

Poetry is a generous art, and it needs generous critics, willing to see it grace the dry-herb dinners of the saints as well as the feasts of sinners. But the hastier critics of this more lusty age cannot quite forgive Tennyson his stainlessness.

There is lack of enterprise, they say, in his moral world, and of the spirit of adventure

in his speculations ; his faith is too simple, his spiritual humility too deep. But I would ask them to take a larger view. The critics who would limit the significance of man's ways, and tether his destiny to that which is visible to the eyes of sense, and who deny the rights of poetry to range in wider realms, are more rash than those who wait expectant, and try to spell out the intimations of man's immortal nature.

But herein, it will be said, is the very defect of Tennyson. The nature of man and that of the universe in which he lives do not surge and heave with meaning for him, as they did for the Romantic Idealists of the preceding age. He touched great themes in a timid way. His poems are perfect etchings, delicately truthful in every line, and in their way supreme, original, unrivalled in our own or any other literature. But they lack range and power and passion. Tennyson gives us glimpses of Nature's nooks and the most faithful renderings of the finite fragments of man's moral and reflective life. But he has not written down "the things that should not be."

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“ All is silver-grey, placid, and perfect with his art.” It never “ gives way ”; always “ he knows both what he wants and what would gain,” and his “ low-pulsed forthright craftsman’s hand ” never fails in execution.¹ There is glamour in his *Princess*, and the enchanted radiance of times which never were in his *Idylls of the King*—fancy, but not imagination; romance, but not mystery. Even in his *In Memoriam*, where reflection moves with the burdened brow of pensive thought along the utter margins of man’s world, there is no Mount of Vision; but everywhere the plain expanse and the sober wealth of Tennyson’s own Eastern Counties. His faith and his doubts were the faith and the doubts of his time; “ like Pope, he found the tersest expressions for its dominant moods and its ruling ideas,”² and gave us faithful transcripts, but nothing more. Child of the flat plains of common experience, he did not

roam at large among unpeopled glens
And mountainous retirements,

¹ See Browning’s *Andrea del Sarto*.

² See Professor Macneile Dixon’s *A Primer of Tennyson*. A most sincere and reliable estimate of the poet.

like Wordsworth ; nor,

reckless of the storm
That keeps the raven quiet in her nest,
was his spirit

As a presence and a motion one
Among the many there, . . .
An equal amongst mightiest energics.

He was the poet of finitude, distinct in every lineament, classical in his methods—the clear, pure, perfect English Virgil. The infinite to him was like the *ἄτειχον* to the Greek. It was awful without being sublime ; it overwhelmed, but did not inspire, for it had neither form nor measure. It was the region of eternal dusk. The rays of knowledge striving with its gloom were foiled, distorted, absorbed ; and the familiar ways of the ordered life of man were lost. Nature's vast powers paid no heed to reason. Like his own Lucretius, he

saw the flaring atom-streams
And torrents of her myriad universe,
Ruining along the illimitable inane,
Fly on to clash together again, and make
Another and another frame of things,
For ever.

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And he was afraid. Browning could revel in the riot. He took a pleasure in the uncouth pride

Of young volcanoes come up, cyclops-like,
Staring together with their eyes on flame.

But Tennyson's imagination was appalled. He feared the forces which the natural sciences of his day were at once setting free and ranging together under laws, universal and inexorable. And this was natural. His day was the hey-day of Materialism. He was not out of touch with the physical sciences as Wordsworth was, and he was much too open-eyed to the truth not to see how their ranks were closing together around the narrowing circle of man's life, and how vain for breaking through were the old devices. Hence Tennyson did not appeal to Nature : he appealed *against* Nature.

The same dread and abhorrence of the lawless infinite appeared in his attitude towards the social forces which first broke loose in his day. Once more his imagination could not match the emergency. He was no Wagner who could set to music the wild cries of the New Democracy. He saw only

its destructive side ; nothing but anarchy could ensue, and he yearned for the simpler order of the past, secured so slowly and with such toil.

Step by step we gain'd a freedom known to Europe,
known to all ;

Step by step we rose to greatness,—thro' the tongue-
sters we may fall.

“ Demagogue,” “ leader of the people,” was no epithet of honour to him. It meant one who would

Bring the old dark ages back without the faith, without
the hope,

Break the State, the Church, the Throne, and roll their
ruins down the slope.

He could not trust his wings over the un-explored abyss of our country's future fate, nor did he share the passion for adventure without end, but like his own Ulysses confined his widest wanderings to the sunlit isles. Linking his hand within the hand of humble faith, he turned his steps backwards towards the old well-ordered ways of a beloved land where it was always afternoon.

Now what are we to say of these negatives ?

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Very simply I answer, that on the whole they are true. But whether they are generally relevant and have any substantial worth, or whether, on the other hand, they have only the distorted truth of a photograph which is out of focus, is another question.

There is a passage in Carlyle's essay on "Goethe," which the negative critic who finds faults may well lay to heart, and which I most certainly do not wish to forget. "The faults of a poem or other piece of art," says Carlyle, "as we view them at first, will by no means continue unaltered when we view them after due and final investigation. Let us consider what we mean by a fault. By the word fault we designate something that displeases us, that contradicts us. But here the question might arise, Who are *we*? This fault displeases, contradicts *us*: so far is clear; and had *we*, had *I*, had *my* pleasure and confirmation been the chief end of the poet, then doubtless he has failed in that end, and his fault remains a fault irremediably, and without defence. But who shall say whether such really was his object, whether such ought

to have been his object ? And if it was not, and ought not to have been, what becomes of the fault ? ”

Now, what measure really is it we are meting to-day to the poet who yesterday meant so much for England, and who may mean so much again to-morrow ? Speaking for myself, I must say that I am diffident, and my own thoughts rebuke me. As a critic of Art I am helpless. I can only *feel* the witchery of his lyrics, the immaculate perfection of his rendering of Nature’s delicate lines and hues ; his knights so full of lusti-hood, “each with a beacon-star upon his head” ; his maids so lily-white. And I am content to ride forth in his train,

Under groves that look’d a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem’d the heavens up-breaking thro’ the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Behold at noon in some delicious dale
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised.

Criticism sinks into silence amongst such scenes as these. And if I turn from his art and call to mind that as a student of philosophy I am expected to speak of his *thoughts*, I must remember that I am, of

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course, the slave of a system—one of those who

take the rustic murmur of their bourg
For the great wave that echoes round the world.

Besides, I am a Celt, unmodified and unrepentant, and Tennyson was a Saxon in every fibre of his mind ; and Celt and Saxon never can quite understand each other. Doomed and yet privileged to live in that confused land where the real and the imaginary, the practical and the impossible, intertwine ; child neither of heaven nor earth, nor, I trust, of the place beneath, the Celt is an incorrigible Romanticist. His very reason is fancy-fed ; he is impatient of the sluggish ways of the persevering world ; and he is a dissenter from every creed. Even beauty must at times for him escape all law ; humour must be reckless and unrestrained ; and truth itself must, as Hegel said, “be drunk in every limb.”¹ The

¹ “Das Wahre ist so der bacchantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist, und weil jedes, indem es sich absondert, eben so unmittelbar sich auflöst—ist er ebenso die durchsichtige und einfache Ruhe.”—*Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, p. 35.

Celt will delight in Tennyson's colouring, and wanton in the wealth of his ornamentation ; but do you think that a Welshman can rejoice really in the same way in Tennyson's utter accuracy and perfect draughtsmanship ; or that an Irishman will find *his own* delirious jollity in such a poem as the *Northern Farmer* ? The Celt can barely understand the deep love of law and of slowly broadening order, or the unyielding tenacity of a poet who mastered his own moods, and could, for forty years, perfect his *Idylls*. You may charge the Celt with "fool fury" if you will, or "wild hysterics," and fail to see that there is method in his madness as well as madness in his method. But he is not entirely without his rights, Romanticist as he is ; and when he is about and in power it is well that you should be awake, both to what he has to give and what he takes away. On the other hand, it were well for him on his part, if he could value a little (not too much) the plain, practical, sound and most limited Saxon sense which could prompt a Jowett to send to a great poet suggestions of subjects for his poems :

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the “Jupiter Olympius,” or, quite simply and slightly, “Relatives in India,” or “I wish Mr. Tennyson could be persuaded to put ‘The Dogma of Immortality’ to verse”! ¹

Verily, Puck’s opinion about our kind was not far wrong.²

But I turn aside from these limitations. I have referred to them because the critic’s part is so hard, so impossible to play. He has to appear in a rôle that is much too large for him. He has to measure the master-minds, and in pronouncing his verdicts pretend to speak for human nature and the nature of things at large. But, even when his heart is generous, his standards are defective; for poetry has many forms and speaks in “infinitely various accents.”

I have not the least doubt that the defects or limitations which are now found in Tennyson’s poetry are in great part our own; that it is impossible for us to pass the

¹ See *Life of Tennyson*, vol. i, pp. 433, 435.

² I have found that one cannot jest south of the Tweed or east of the Severn, except at one’s personal peril; for one occasionally meets, not the Englishman who is an Anglo-Celt, but an Anglo-Saxon. May I ask the latter not to take this contrast too literally?

final verdict, and that we must not pretend to do so. The time has not come as yet. There are Arts and Sciences on which we can deliver judgment at once. We need not delay, for instance, before pronouncing a theory of Mathematics or a hypothesis of Natural Science to be true or false. But the poet's case "is a case reserved."

I have been trying to think what it is which time must bring before the world can pass a trustworthy judgment on the poet; for, of course, time's mere lapse means nothing. Why is it, for instance, that the critics count it a defect in Tennyson that he shared the fears, the hopes, the beliefs, the doubts, the opinions of his age? We do not blame Sophocles for living within the horizon of *his* times. We do not think Isaiah the less poet for sharing the hopes of Israel, or Euripides for giving voice to the doubts which darkened his age's decaying faith. We know that the perishable forms of human life can be filled by the poet with imperishable meanings, and that moral civilizations can put on immortality. The *theme* of the poet, as well as his rendering of it, can be

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lifted into the realm of imagination ; and then it is like a treasure laid up in heaven, out of the reach of corruption. Greece lives for ever in its poets ; so does Israel ; so does Rome ; so does the England of Shakespeare, and the age of Milton and Pope and Wordsworth ; and so may Tennyson's England yet : for, as has been well said by one of the truthfullest of all his critics, "he was above and beyond all the poet of England, and the best lover among her poet sons."¹

A great English literary critic, in some ways the greatest of them now living, I mean Professor Bradley, has referred to the attempt to distinguish between the perishable and the imperishable elements in great poetry ; and especially to the theory that would place reflective opinions, beliefs, doubts, systems, whether they be religious, philosophical, social, or political, in the former class.² This theory is not all false, but I cannot think that it is the last word on this matter. No one now believes in the

¹ Professor Maencile Dixon : *A Primer of Tennyson*.

² See *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 170, 173 and 362.

theology of Homer, but still we offer sweet sacrifice to his gods and goddesses, and we would not for any price pull down their altars. Can you divide the *Iliad* into two parts, and gather the social views, the politics, the theology, together in one heap and call them perishable ? Not in the least : they, too, have suffered change, to suffer change no more ; for they have become objects of the imagination. As the

moving accidents by flood and field,
The hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,

became a tale of love in Desdemona's ear, or as the winter's rages pass into the gentle days of spring or summer's quiet evenings, so, by a process that is "strange and passing strange," the risks and disasters of a nation's life, even the bickerings of its creeds and the contentions of its politics, pass imperceptibly into the imperishable form of poetry. *But not till the strain and the strife of the actual experience of them is past.*

Poetry demands detachment ; but so also does the true or poetic appreciation of poetry ; and that detachment from the

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poetry of Tennyson has not yet come. Our era, in spite of many differences, and the dim looming of other times to come, is still the same as Tennyson's, and our critical estimates are not safe. The world is turning another side to the sun, but the change of the spiritual seasons is not yet complete. It is true that Tennyson does not rule in our sky at the height of noon as he did in the middle of what we call the Victorian age ; and that his fame is for the moment westerling. But the reason is in ourselves : it is the earth that turns. The religious doubts and the political fears which tried his faith and courage are still abroad. Our spirits are, as regards these things, not yet at peace. We cannot look at his themes through a serene atmosphere as we look at the objects sung by the poets of ages long ago. Our poetic judgment is disturbed by our concern for "*causes*" ; and, in consequence, Tennyson's fame wades amongst our floating opinions like the moon amongst the clouds, and his silvery light is often obscured.

Of two things only, it seems to me, is it

possible for us at this time to be steadfastly certain. The first is the absolute originality of Tennyson's artistic touch. Whatever may be the compass of his voice, there can be no question of the uniqueness of its quality. It is like a rich and unobtrusive *alto* saturating with its subtle sweetness the harmonies of the greatest choir of singers the world has ever known. On this matter all the critics worthy of the least respect are at one.

The second is the absolute fidelity of his rendering of his age—a thing which the critics know but have not yet recognized as also a possession for ever; for they are still entangled in its experience. Hegel has compared the man of genius in his relation to his age to one who places the last and locking-stone in an arch. Many hands have helped to build the structure, but it is in his hand alone that it becomes a thing complete, balanced, self-sustained, and sure. And such a master's hand was Tennyson's—the last of our country's truly immortal poets.

The last as yet; but, I must believe, not the last of all. There is another arch a-build-

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ing, hanging incomplete with its wider span over wilder waters. For there is a seething of religious beliefs and a lawless raging of social forces the like of which has probably not been seen before. But I believe that deep down amidst the surging doubts, the foundations of a stronger faith both in God and in our country's destiny are being slowly laid. It is a faith *in facts*, and not a faith *in spite of facts*. It appeals, not to God *against* Nature, but to God *in* Nature and in the mind of man. It is not a faith rent in twain by dualisms as Tennyson's was ; for the iron grasp of the mechanical conceptions of the Victorian age is relaxing its hold. It is a faith in a universe which is not dead but divine—the living garment of the great, good God. This faith promises to possess the souls of men enduringly, and it, too, will find its poet.

Tennyson's courage was the courage which his day demanded ; and you have only to turn to such testimony as that of Bishop Westcott or Henry Sidgwick, in order to realize what Tennyson meant for his time.¹

¹ See *Tennyson's Life*, vol. i, pp. 300-4.

Tennyson

His was the unflinching courage and the tenacious hope of a traveller across an arid waste, who, when all his companions cried out "Mirage," maintained that yet there was somewhere in the vast expanse a green oasis and living waters. His own lips were parched with thirst, and his strength wellnigh fordone.

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

The spiritual waters had sunk very low in that age, nay, they were wellnigh lost; but I think that the rains are coming and that springs will rise in the desert, and that mankind will yet drink deep, and know that God and Nature satisfy.

Not less full of hope, in my opinion, is the outlook in other directions. I think that the social seethings which brought such fear upon Tennyson's order-loving heart and added weight to his patient eighty years,

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will also find their law that holds them in their channel. Our country "will emerge, one day." And well, indeed, will it be if, when that day comes, it will find a Poet faithful to its highest hope and noblest life as Tennyson was throughout his own long day of purest service.

Carlyle tells us that : "The old Arab tribes would gather in liveliest *gaudeamus*, and sing, and kindle bonfires and wreath the crowns of honour and solemnly thank the gods that in their tribe, too, a Poet had shown himself. As, indeed, they well might ; for what usefuller, I say not nobler and heavenlier thing, could the gods, doing their very kindest, send to any tribe or nation, in any time or circumstances ? "

England, being confused by the foolish gossip of poisonous tongues—the England which Carlyle rated so soundly and loved so well—forgot, to her bitter shame, the returning cycle of *his* birth. I am glad it has not been so with Tennyson, as I come, in obedience to our Council, to place my withering flower on his grave.

*Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*¹

THE best explanation of a poet is to be sought in the best poem he has written, or in that theme which, at his touch, breaks out into the amplest music. There, his very self, the personality which he verily is and which, in a greater or lesser degree, subtly suffuses all that he does, finds fittest and fullest utterance ; and the utterance itself, whether in phrase or figure, being faithful to fact, bears that stamp of inevitability which implies perfection.

There is little doubt as to the theme which called forth the fullness of the powers of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. It was love. It was love in the same cosmic sense as Wordsworth's duty, which "pre-

¹ Contributed to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. xiii, 1916.

served the stars from wrong," an omnipresent passion for the best in all nature and in all mankind. To Elizabeth Browning, there was no truth nor substance, save love. It was the essence and wholeness of her being, and it expressed itself with unrestrained prodigality in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Everything in her life that went before—the beauty of her early home among the Malverns, the whole practice of her literary industry, the long lone years of illness and weakness, the heavy sorrow of the death-stricken home—is taken up, sanctified and dedicated in these poems; and everything that was to follow was but harvest-gleaning and aftermath. These sonnets, and, one is tempted to say, these sonnets only, of all that Elizabeth Browning wrote, the world will in no wise let go. They are equalled only by her life—in Milton's sense,¹ they *are* her life.

Robert Browning cannot be so easily summed and surveyed. His skill was multifarious far beyond the wont even of great poets. There was hardly an instrument

¹ *Arcopagitica*.

in the orchestra which he could not play, his touch was always unique and recognizable; and, within the domain of human character, there was hardly a bent or trait, a passion or propensity, which he did not celebrate. Nevertheless, when, like his Arion, he "gathers his greatness round him," and "stands in state," and "harp and voice rend air" with his full "magnificence of song,"¹ the theme is almost certain to be some phase of love. And love had the same cosmic, constitutive character to him, the same, or even greater, moral worth and spiritual splendour. Speaking of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a critic has observed with truth that "as pieces of poetry they are not equal to the sonnets of Wordsworth or of Milton, yet it is not so unreasonable to question whether their removal would not leave a more irreparable gap in literature."²

The removal of love from among Browning's themes would be, original as he was in everything, the removal of his most

¹ *Fifine at the Fair.*

² Hugh Walker, *The Literature of the Victorian Era*.

original, as well as his most massively valuable, contribution to our literature. It would have left the poet himself a man without a purpose in a universe without meaning. Love, in the last resort, was the only article in his creed. For these reasons, the convergence of these two lives into unity and their most intimate commingling ever after, have an artistic meaning no less than an ethical interest, and they concern the literary critic not less than the biographer. Not that either of the two poets, when their 'prentice days were over, was content to be imitative, or could possibly be conceived as moving in the other's manner. There was no sacrifice of independence—there never is when the union is spiritual in character and complete. They even took precautions against influencing one another when a poem was in the making. Nevertheless, what they meant for one another was more subtle and penetrating and pervasive than any direct and explicit borrowing, over which the critic could cry "Lo here," or "Lo there." It is more easy to suggest and to instance than to describe their influ-

ence on each other : but a crowning example, I believe, is to be found in Browning's *Pompilia*. There are charms, and, above all, there are intensities, scattered abroad in *The Ring and the Book* which would not have been possible, even for him, had it not been for his "lyric Love." No one was more eager to be dramatical than Browning, or less willing to expose to a gaping world the pageant of his inner life. But, after all, a poet dips his pen in his own blood when he writes what the world *must* read ; if he be robbed of experience as a man, he stands more bare as a poet ; and, in the experience of both Robert and Elizabeth Browning, there was one event paramount, one sovereign fact that lent meaning to all that followed. This was their discovery of one another and the unique perfection of their wedded life. Criticism of the Brownings and of their meaning to literature dare not disregard or discount a mutual penetration of personalities so intense as theirs, but must, in dealing with the one, be aware that it is dealing with the other as well. In this respect, what went before in their

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life and work was but preliminary, and what came after mere consequent.

Robert Browning was younger than Elizabeth Barrett by some six years. He was born in Southampton Street, Camberwell, on May 7, 1812. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England, of literary and artistic tastes, and his mother the daughter of a Dundee shipowner of German extraction.

It is more easy to read the acorn in terms of the oak than the oak in terms of the acorn ; and the great man reveals and explains, rather than is revealed and explained by, the capacities that slumbered in his forefathers. While none can deny the heredity of the features of the soul, any more than those of the body, it is idle to pretend that the lineaments of a great man's spirit can be traced back with any degree of accuracy to his ancestors ! Every man, even the most meagre in endowment, has so many ancestors ! But the psychical structure and propensities of his *immediate* parents have a significance all their own : for these define and determine the environment within which the child's

mind lives and moves and has its being. The home, during the years when, most of all, the soul is being made, stands to the child for solid earth and starry firmament, and the influences operative therein are the air and the food and the drink, and, therefore, the very substance embodied in his personality. From this point of view, the simple piety of Browning's mother, her membership of an "Independent Church" in Walworth, her lifelong class in the Sunday School, her box for contributions to the London Missionary Society lose their insignificance. In these and other habits, the child saw the spirit of religion made real and ratified by his mother, and it remained with him, much modified it is true, but, owing to his mother's memory, permanently holy and always dominant.

Again, it must not be said that Browning's "genius was derived from his father." Genius is not derived. It is always a miracle and has no history. But the father's genius, that of a lover of art and of literature, made the son a lover of books and a collector of them. It led him to write verse—which he did fluently, and after the manner of Pope;

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and he had a great delight in grotesque rimes. Moreover, he was so skilful in the use of his pencil that Rossetti pronounced him to possess "a real genius for drawing." Now, "the handsome, vigorous, fearless child," unrestingly active, fiery of temper, crowded with energy of mind, observant and most swift to learn, naturally saw all these things and, not less naturally, imitated the ways of his parents and sought to acquire what they valued.

In Browning's case, no educational influence counts at all, in comparison with that of his father's tastes and habits and collection of books. That influence can be traced in the poet's choice of themes, all the way from *Pauline* and *Sordello* to *Parleyings* and *Asolando*, and it even marks his manner of dealing with many of them. He read voraciously in his father's library, apparently without let or guidance, and his acquaintance was very early with the works of Voltaire, the letters of Junius and of Horace Walpole, the *Emblems* of Quarles and Croxall's *Fables*. The first book he ever bought with his own money was Macpherson's *Ossian*.

Side by side with this precocious literary omnivorousness went, from early childhood, careful training in music. "I was studying the Grammar of Music," he said, according to Mrs. Ireland, "when most children are learning the Multiplication Table." Moreover, he was given permission, at an age lower than the rules allowed, to visit the Dulwich gallery, which was hard by his father's home. It became "a beloved haunt of his childhood." He was grateful all his life for the privilege and used to recall, in later years, "the triumphant Murillo pictures," "such as Watteau" and "all the Poussins" he had seen there.

The contribution made by school and college to the education of Browning was even less significant than it has been in the case of most great poets. His *real* masters, besides his father and his father's library in general, were the poets, and especially Byron and Shelley. "The first composition I was ever guilty of," he wrote to Elizabeth Barrett in 1846, "was something in imitation of Ossian." But he never could "recollect not writing rhymes," though

he "knew they were nonsense even then." "It is not surprising," says Herford, "that a boy of these proclivities was captivated by the stormy swing and sweep of Byron," and that, as the poet told Elizabeth Barrett, he "would have gone to Finchley to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves"; whereas he "could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room if at the other end of it all Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were condensed into the little China bottle yonder."¹ When he was twelve years of age, a collection under the title *Incondita* was made of his "Byronic poems," and the father would have liked to publish it. No publisher was found willing, and the young author destroyed the manuscript. But the poems had been seen by Eliza Flower (sister of the authoress of the hymn *Nearer, my God, to Thee*), who made a copy of them and showed it to W. J. Fox, editor of *The Monthly Repository*. According to Browning's statement to Gosse, the editor found in them "too great splendour of language and too little wealth of thought,"

¹ To E. B., August 22, 1846.

but, also, a “mellifluous smoothness”; and Fox did not forget the boy-poet.

Browning next passed under an influence which was still more inspiring and intimate. He chanced upon Shelley’s *Queen Mab* on a bookstall, and became, in consequence of assimilating it, “a professing atheist and a practising vegetarian.” With some difficulty, his mother secured for him others of “Mr. Shelley’s atheistical poems”; and, apparently, through *Adonais*, he was led to Keats. In the winter of 1829–30, he attended classes in Greek and Latin, and, for a very short time, in German, at University College, London; and, afterwards, Blundell’s lectures in medicine, at Guy’s Hospital. Meantime, he carried on his studies in music, and sang, danced, boxed and rode.

This, if any, was his period of *Sturm und Drang*—during which, by the way, he lived on potatoes and bread! He chafed a little at the social limitations of the home he loved well, and he gave his devoted parents a little entirely needless anxiety: his temperament was buoyant, his soul like a ship crowded with sails, and he was a venture-

some mariner. But his wanderings were of the imagination, and his "excesses" were literary both in origin and in outcome. In truth, all the time, he was living within the bounds, nay, drawing his strength and his inspiration from those convictions of the stable things of the world of spirit in the power of which he went forth, in later days, to challenge, in every form of joust and tournament and in many an adventure, the forces of doubt and falsehood and denial and crime. He had not to suffer in his later life from any treacherous aches of half-forgotten wounds to character, but faced life sound in every limb and (one is tempted to add) arrogantly healthy.

The wholesome and wealthy confusion of this seething period of the young poet's life is faithfully rendered or, rather, betrayed, in the brilliant and incoherent *Pauline*—Browning's earliest published poem. Pauline herself, except for the first half-dozen lines and a footnote, is the shadow of a shade—the passive recipient of the psychological confessions of a young poet: a young poet, who, not at all unaware of his curls and lace and

ruffles has been turning himself round and round before the mirror, and has found that he is too noble a being, too bold, reckless, unrestrained, sceptical, brilliant, intense, wide-souled, hungry for knowledge and love for this workaday world. The self-consciousness is not "intense," as J. S. Mill thought. It is picturesque. It is not "morbid" or unwholesome, as other critics have averred. It is only the frippery, the most serious mock-believe tragical outpourings of an extraordinarily handsome and innocent youth, who, in truth, had never known disappointment nor looked in the face of sorrow. Browning's dislike of the poem in later years was entirely natural. He resented all prying into private life, and was, of all men, least willing to "sonnet-sing about himself." So, the drapery in which he had clothed himself in this early poem seemed to him to be almost transparent, and he felt as if he had been going about nude.

Pauline was published in January, 1833, anonymously, when its author was twenty years old. But that fine critic, W. J. Fox, discerned its merit and dealt with it in

generous praise in *The Monthly Repository* for April in the same year. Allan Cunningham, also, praised it in *The Athenæum*. Some years later (probably in 1850), Rossetti found and transcribed it in the reading-room of the British Museum, and he wrote to Browning, who was in Florence, to ask him "whether he was the author of a poem called *Pauline*." Beyond this, the poem attracted no attention. Why, it is difficult to say. That it is mastered by its material, flooded by its own wealth, is true. Of all Browning's poems, it is the only one which owes its difficulty to confusion; and it is, in fact, to use the poet's own phrase, a "boyish work." But what work for a boy! There are passages in it, not a few, of a beauty that exceeds so much as to belong to a sphere of being into which mediocrity never for a moment gains entry. So long as he has this theatrically earnest boy at his side, the reader is never safe from the surprise of some sudden splash of splendour:

the boy
With his white breast and brow and clustering curls
Streaked with his mother's blood, but striving hard
To tell his story ere his reason goes.

He is "exploring passion and mind," he says, "for the first time," "dreaming not of restraint but gazing on all things." He is "borne away, as Arab birds float sleeping in the wind, o'er deserts, towers, and forests." He "nourishes music more than life, and old lore," and "knows the words shall move men, like a swift wind." In every way, *Pauline* must remain a supremely interesting poem to Browning's readers : it holds in bud many of Browning's qualities, powers and even convictions.

After the publication of *Pauline*, in 1833, Browning visited Petrograd with Benkhausen, the Russian Consul-General ; and it was probably this contact with official life which led him, shortly after his return to England, to apply—in vain—for a post on a Persian mission. During this period, there is ample evidence of physical and mental exuberance, but little of poetic activity. It was many years later that the Russian visit yielded the forest-scene of the thrilling tale of Ivàn Ivànovitch, and his toying with the Persian mission (possibly) suggested *Ferishtah*. But his interest in the complicated subtleties of

diplomacy appeared in *Sordello* and *Strafford* as well as in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*—not to mention *Bishop Blougram* and *Caliban upon Setebos*. In 1834, however, there appeared in *The Monthly Repository* a series of five poetic contributions of which the most noteworthy were *Porphyria*, afterwards entitled *Porphyria's Lover*, and the six stanzas beginning “Still ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no,” which were republished in *James Lee's Wife*. Then, with a preface dated March 15, 1835, when its author still lacked two months of completing his twenty-third year, there appeared one of the most marvellous productions of youthful poetic genius in the history of any literature.

Browning is said to have written *Paracelsus* in six months, meditating not a few of its passages during midnight walks, within sight of the glare of London lights, and the muffled hearing of its quieting tumult. This poem belongs to an altogether different altitude from that of *Pauline*. Instead of a confused rendering of vague dreams and seething sentiments and passions, we have, in *Paracelsus*, the story of the lithe and sinewy strength

of early manhood, the manifold powers of a most gifted spirit braced together and passionately dedicated to the service of an iron-hard intellectual ambition. Here is the “intensest life” resolute upon acquiring, at any cost, the intellectual mastery of mankind.

The subject was suggested to Browning by a French royalist and refugee, Count Amédée de Ripert-Monclar, and the poem is dedicated to him. Browning was already acquainted with the career and character of Paracelsus—his works were in his father’s library. Moreover, it is beyond doubt that, at this stage of his life, in particular, the poet was driven by a like hunger for knowledge and ambition for intellectual sovereignty. His reading of his subject implies affinity of mind and is altogether sympathetic. The eccentricities of behaviour, the charlatanism, the boundless conceit, the miracles and absurdities with which Paracelsus was accredited by popular belief, either disappear or are sublimated into elements of a dramatic romance which has something of the greatness and seriousness of tragedy.

To assume that Browning, in this poem, was depicting "the fall of a logician," or of set design "destroying the intellectualist fallacy," is to misunderstand the spirit in which the poem was written. The adventurous alchemist was himself too much a poet to serve such an unpoetic purpose, even if Browning had been so little a poet as to form it. Paracelsus does not "fall": he "attains."

"Far from convicting him of intellectual futility, Browning actually made him divine the secret he sought, and, in one of the most splendid passages of modern poetry, declare with his dying lips a faith which is no less Browning's than his own."¹ True! knowledge without love is not even power; but neither is love without knowledge; and the consummation of the achievement of Paracelsus is that love becomes the means of knowledge and intelligence the instrument of love. "The simultaneous perception of Love and Power in the Absolute" was, in Browning's view, "the noblest and predominant characteristic of Shelley"; and,

¹ Herford.

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for Browning, even in his most "metaphysical" days, when knowledge was always said to have "failed," it was still a power.

Paracelsus is the most miraculous and inexplicable of all the exhibitions of Browning's genius. The promise it contained, with all the poet's lasting greatness, was not fulfilled. Its form and artistic manner, the lineaments and the movements of the mind which works within it, the noble passions which moved the poet and the faith which inspired and controlled him—these are pre-eminently illuminating to the student of Browning and by far the best introduction to all he strove to do. *Paracelsus* is interesting, also, as touching the new times which were dawning around the young poet. In its closing pages, something of the spirit of modern science comes forth, for the moment, at least, wearing the garb of poetry. Never was the conception of the evolutionary continuity of nature more marvellously rendered,

as successive zones
Of several wonder open on some spirit
Flying secure and glad from heaven to heaven.

The young poet had even grasped, what took the world another half-century to perceive, that the idea of evolution levelled upwards and not downwards, spiritualized nature rather than naturalized spirit.

The minor characters of *Paracelsus* need not detain us. Festus is the common-sense foil of the hero, and the gentle domestic Michal, maiden and sorrowing mother, is only less of a shadow than Pauline. Aprile is an unsubstantial moonstruck "wraith of a poet," who "would love infinitely and be loved"; but his rôle is most significantly derived and borrowed and accidental.

I saw Aprile—my Aprile there!
And as the poor melodious wretch disburthened
His heart, and moaned his weakness in my ear,
I learned my own deep error.

Paracelsus learnt from him "the worth of love in man's estate and what proportion love should hold with power." It was this new knowledge which made him wise to know mankind,

Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
be proud

“ all with a touch of nobleness . . . upward tending,”

Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him.

With this knowledge, this “splendour of God’s lamp” on his dying brow, he is as secure of “emerging one day,” as he was when he first set forth “to prove his soul.”

Paracelsus, on its publication, was hailed by the ever faithful and watchful Fox; but the most striking notice it received was from John Forster. He predicted for the author a brilliant career, and, in a second article on the poem, said, with unusual daring as well as insight, “Without the slightest hesitation we name Mr. Robert Browning at once with Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth.” But, by most journals, *Paracelsus* was simply neglected. In his letters to Elizabeth Barrett, Browning refers to the contemptuous treatment it received. It brought him neither money nor fame.

But it brought him, first, the acquaintance, and, then, the friendship, of the most distinguished men of the day—among them

were Wordsworth, Dickens, Landor and Carlyle ; and in nothing was the manly munificence of Browning's nature more evident than in his friendships. His affection for Landor, touched with sympathy as well as admiration, showed itself, in later years, in a care for him which was "one of the most beautiful incidents in a beautiful life." The friendship with Carlyle was, on both sides, peculiarly warm and trustful. "I have just seen dear Carlyle," says Browning, "catch me calling people 'dear' in a hurry"; and that Carlyle should cross over to Paris just to see and dine with Browning is, assuredly, eloquent of his regard and affection for the young poet. "Commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle," says Browning of his translation of *Agamemnon*, "and rewarded will it indeed become if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name." John Forster and William Macready were also added at this time to the group of Browning's friends, and his acquaintance with the latter had, for a time, an important bearing upon his work.

In *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, it has been well said, Browning had “analysed rather than exhibited” character. The soul, “the one thing” which he thought “worth knowing,” was the psychologist’s abstract entity, little more than a stage occupied successively by moods and passions: it was not the concrete, complex self, veined and blood-tinctured. Moreover (which signifies much), all its history fell within itself, and external circumstance, instead of furnishing it with the material out of which character is hewn, was but “decoration,” to use Browning’s own phrase, and was purposely put into the background. These two poems were thus justly called “confessional”: they were subjective and self-conscious.

No sooner was *Paracelsus* finished than Browning contemplated another “soul-history.” In it, once more, a greatly aspiring soul was to recognize, only at the last moment and after much “apparent failure,” the mission which could save, fitting to the finite his infinity. The story that he wished to tell was *Sordello*.

But the material was stubborn as well as

rich, and it resisted easy and early mastery. Possibly, also, the "confessional" mood was passing. In any case, Browning, who was always and almost solely interested in human character, was thinking of depicting character in action. He was eager, as he said in his preface to *Strafford*, "to freshen a jaded mind by diverting it to the healthy natures of a grand epoch." Browning's mind, no doubt, was turned to Strafford by Forster, who, with some help from Browning, had written the great statesman's life. But it was at a supper given by Talfourd to celebrate the first performance of *Ion* that Macready, to whom Browning had already spoken of his intention of writing a tragedy, said "Write a play, Browning, and keep me from going to America." *Strafford*, which was the result of the request, was acted at Covent Garden Theatre on May 1, 1837—Macready appearing as Strafford and Helen Faucit as Lady Carlisle. Its stage history was brief. It was not "damned" on the first night, but just escaped; it was applauded on the second; and it died an unnatural death after the fifth. It was betrayed: the

player who acted Pym refusing "to save England even once more," and Browning vowing that "never again would he write a play!"

The tragical element in the play is the collision of the two loyalties—that of Strafford to the king and that of Pym to England : and the tragedy borrows its intensity from the fact that the king whom Strafford loves will not save him, and that Pym, who loves Strafford, sends him to his death. Pym "was used to stroll with him, arm locked in arm," and, in early days, had even read the same needs in England's face, while

Eliot's brow grew broad with noble thoughts.

The atmosphere of the play is that of "a thorough self-devotement, self-forgetting." The characters are all simple, and apt to be always in one condition of mind. They have a generous magnitude and strength and vigour ; but they are too consistently in a state of exaltation, inclined to be declamatory and self-conscious and to be always expounding the movements of their own minds. Indeed, not one of Browning's

characters in any of his plays fairly comes out into the open air and on the high road, except, perhaps, Pippa.

In the preface to *Strafford*, Browning says that "he had for some time been engaged on a Poem of a very different nature, when induced to make the present attempt." This poem, as already hinted, was *Sordello*, Browning's second study of a poetic soul, but a soul, this time, caught in the context of large and imperious circumstance and quite unlike *Aprile*.

Many have explained *Sordello*, and some have comprehended it. It is uncompromisingly and irretrievably difficult reading. No historical account of the conflicts of Ghibelline and Guelph, no expository annotation of any kind, not even its own wealth of luminous ideas or splendour of Italian city scenes and solitudes, can justify it entirely as a work of art. We may render its main plot in simple terms : how Sordello, endowed with powers that might have made him the Apollo of his people and victorious in a contest of song over Eglamor, his poetic foil, finds, unexpectedly, eminent station

and political power within his grasp, but gains a victory of another kind, rising superior to the temptation doubly urged by the Ghibelline captain and the beauty of Parma ; how the double victory has still left him a dabbler and loiterer, a Hamlet in both poetry and politics ; how, clinging to his ideal, the cause of humanity, but failing to make it dominant over his "finite" world, he "dies under the strain of choice." But no simplification of the story suffices. It is dark from the very intensity and multiplicity of the playing cross-lights ; for the main ideas are reflected innumerabley from the countless facets of the facts which the poet displays in confusingly rapid succession. Brilliancy, swiftness of movement, the sudden exclamation made to convey a complex thought, the crowded intrusion of parenthetical antecedents, the elision of connecting relatives—such are the characteristics which make it difficult to decipher.

It is no wonder that the appearance of *Sordello*, in 1840, destroyed the somewhat timid promise of public favour which *Paracelsus* had brought to the poet. We

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are told that the "gentle literary public" of those days had found *Sartor Resartus* unintelligible, and frankly turned away from Browning. But the suggested comparison is misleading and the criticism is unfair. The difficulties of *Sartor* have disappeared with the new times which Carlyle introduced ; those of *Sordello* will stay so long as the mental structure of men remains the same.

"I blame no one," said Browning, "least of all myself, who did my best then and since." It was in no perverse mood of intellectual pride or of scorn for the public mind that he wrote *Sordello*. His error was, rather, the opposite. "Freighted full of music," crowded with the wealth of his detailed knowledge, rapt with the splendour of his poetic visions, he, in the simplicity of his heart, forgot his public so completely as to assume, as a matter of course, that his readers were able to wing their flight at his side.

There are evidences that the experience was painful and that its effects lasted. In *The Ring and the Book*, and elsewhere, there is, in the resolute simplification of the

narrative and the painful iteration, a clue to the effect of the failure of *Sordello* upon his workmanship. Both as he entered upon and as he closed that greatest of all his poetic adventures, there is a hint of a challenge and a touch of reproof, and even scorn, of the "British Public."

ye who like me not,
(God love you !)—whom I yet have laboured for,
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran.

But it is time to turn to the outward events of this period of Browning's life. These were his journey to Italy and the removal of the family to Hatcham. He started for Italy on Good Friday, 1838, travelling as sole passenger on a merchantman. On the voyage, he wrote the glorious story of the ride from Ghent to Aix, and *Home Thoughts from the Sea*. One of his objects was to gather materials for *Sordello*; but he harvested much more from his visit. It was, for him, "a time of enchantment." He saw Asolo and Venice and Padua; he visited mountain solitudes, and he brought home a passionate and enduring love for

Italy. Italian themes were, henceforth, to be favourites of his imagination, and his life in that country was, for many years to come, to saturate his experience.

At the time when Browning was "going to begin the finishing of *Sordello*," as he wrote to Miss Haworth, he was also beginning "thinking a Tragedy." He had still another tragedy in prospect, he tells us, and "wrote best so provided." The two tragedies were *King Victor and King Charles* and *The Return of the Druses*. He was also occupied with what was not strictly a play, but a new poetic form—a series of scenes connected together like pearls on a silken thread by the magic influence of the little silk-winder of Asolo—the exquisitely beautiful and simple *Pippa Passes*. The plays were written with the view of being acted; but Macready's refusal kept them back, for a time, and they were published. They appeared in a series of what may be called poetical pamphlets, issued between 1841 and 1846, which undoubtedly constituted as remarkable literary merchandise as was ever offered to any public. This plan of publication was sug-

gested by Moxon, and was intended to popularize the poet's works by selling them cheaply. They were at first sold at sixpence. But (among other hindrances) they were called *Bells and Pomegranates*, and it was only at the close of the series and on the instigation of Elizabeth Barrett that Browning explained to the puzzled readers how it was intended by this reference to "the hem of the robe of the high priest" to indicate "the mixture of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought," which the pamphlets were. Moreover, literary critics had not forgotten or forgiven *Sordello*, and literary prejudice is stubborn stuff. Even *Pippa Passes*, the first of the series, had a reluctant and frigid reception. A generously appreciative article, in *The Eclectic Review*, in 1849, mentions it along with *Sordello* as one of the poems against which "the loudest complaints of obscurity have been raised."

Nothing that Browning ever wrote was better fitted than *Pippa Passes* to arrest the public attention. It was as novel in charm as it was in form. Pippa herself, it

has been suggested,¹ is Browning's Ariel—a magic influence in the magic isle of man's world. The little silk-winder, walking along the streets of Asolo on her "one day in the year" and fancying herself to be, in turn, each of its "Four Happiest Ones," pours forth her lyric soul in song. The songs striking into the world of passions, plots and crimes, in which the "Four Happiest Ones" were involved, arrest, cleanse and transform. She is as charming as the lyrics she carols. Elizabeth Barrett "could find in her heart to envy the Author," and *Pippa* was Browning's own favourite among the creations of his early manhood. She has "crept into the study of imagination" of all his readers ever since.

Pippa Passes was followed, in 1842, by *King Victor and King Charles*, and that tragedy, in turn, by a collection of some sixteen short pieces, which were called *Dramatic Lyrics*. Then, in 1843, appeared *The Return of the Druses*, written some years earlier, and two other plays—*A Blot in the Scutcheon* and *Colombe's Birthday* (published

¹ By Herford.

in 1844). These were followed by another collection of short poems, on the greatest variety of subjects, entitled *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. In 1846, the series entitled *Bells and Pomegranates* was brought to an end, and Browning's period of play-writing closed with *Luria* and the dramatic sketch *A Soul's Tragedy*.

At this time, also, the first period of Browning's amazing productiveness came to a close. The poems that appeared cannot even be classified except in the roughest way, and any classification must mislead. The familiar distinctions which criticism sets up fade and become false. There are lyrical effects in most of the dramas, dramatic touches in almost every lyric and romance, and his muse will not be demure and prim. On the other hand, the variety of the subjects, forms, moods, scenes and passions, and of the workings of each of them, baffles classification. And each is so "clear proclaimed"—whether "Hope rose a-tiptoe," or "Rapture drooped the eyes," or "Confidence lit swift the forehead up"—that the distinctions, if they are to be faithful, must be as numerous

as the poems themselves. In truth, it is not art but science, not love but knowledge, which classifies. So far as poems are true works of art, each one is, and must be, unique—a carved golden cup filled with its own wine. For the artist, every song in turn is the one song, and, for the lover, every tress of hair, in turn, “is the fairest tress of all.”

Browning himself, however, suggests two points of view from which the poems may be observed. He characterizes them all as “dramatic.” How far is this qualification accurate? Was Browning’s genius verily dramatic in character? The question is not easily answered, even although it can be profitably asked. In comparison with Wordsworth, who was both the most self-contained and the most impersonal of all our poets, we must answer the question with a clear affirmative. But, compared with Shakespeare, or with Sir Walter Scott (as novelist), the difference is so great as to make the epithet “dramatic” positively misleading. Of not one of Shakespeare’s creations can we say, “Here is the author

himself"; of scarcely one of Browning's can we say "Here the author is not." Browning, in writing to Elizabeth Barrett, called the poems "Mere escapes of my inner power, like the light of a revolving lighthouse leaping out at intervals from a narrow chink." The analogy is true in more than one sense. The poems carry suggestions of the abundance of riches within the poet's own living, alert, enterprising, sense-fraught, passion-fused soul; the motley throng of his *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Romances* and *Dramatis Personæ* also stand in the brilliant glare of his personality—not in the unobtrusive, quiet light of common day. There is hardly a stratum of society, an age of history, a corner of the world of man, which is altogether absent from these poems; nevertheless, we never escape the sense of the author's powerful presence. In all the diversities of type, race and character, there are persistent qualities, and they are the poet's own.

There is no quality of Shakespeare's mind which can be found in all his plays, except, perhaps, his gentleness: even as only the one epithet "gentle" satisfies when we speak

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of Shakespeare himself. But "gentleness" is just tolerance suffused with kindness; and, where tolerance is perfect, preferences disappear, and the poet himself remains always revealing and never revealed.

To deny tolerance to Browning is impossible, and would utterly destroy his claim to be dramatic. There is a real sense in which he stands aloof from his creations, neither approving nor disapproving but letting them go. Bishop Blougram and Mr. Sludge; Caliban and the bishop of St. Praxed's; the lady of *The Laboratory* and of *The Confessional*; the lion of *The Glove* with "those eyes wide and steady,"

leagues in the desert already,
Driving the flocks up the mountain,

and the live creatures in *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis*—"worm, slug, eft, with serious features," tickling and tousling and browsing him all over—all these are given a place in the sun, no less than his Valence or Caponsacchi, Colombe or Constance. It were unpardonable in a critic not to recognize that, for Browning, there was no form which the human soul could take that

was too strange, complex, monstrous, magnificent, commonplace and drab, in its hate or love or in any other passion, to be interesting in the artistic and purely impersonal sense. All the same, his tolerant universality is not like Shakespeare's in quality. There are, in Browning, no characters whom we must condemn and, also, must approve; whom we cannot justify and would not miss, but like beyond all speech or sense. There is no Jack Falstaff, nor even a Dogberry, or Bottom, or Launce, far less a Touchstone. There is no Bob Acres, even, or Sir Anthony Absolute.

Browning *will* persist in appealing to our reason. It is always a question of what accepts or refuses to accept its control. Morality, at rare moments, is allowed to see to itself, and the beautiful and ugly stand justified or condemned in their own right. But truth always matters to him, and his intellectualizing propensities never rest. The play of fancy is rarely quite irresponsible, and of humour more rarely still. There is no touch in Browning of the singing rogue Autolycus. Some of his lyrics,

no doubt, are as light as they are lovely; and *The Pied Piper* is by no means the only first-rate example of joyous story-telling. Nevertheless, Browning, many as are the parts he plays, is not like Bottom—he cannot aggravate his voice and roar us gently. He is never splendidly absurd, nor free of every purpose. Even at this period, he is plagued with problems, crammed with knowledge, crowded with mental energy, a revolving lighthouse bursting with light. In a word, he is intense and purposive, and his purposiveness and intensity had many consequences, not all of them favourable to his dramatic work. A brief study of these is illuminative of his whole work as a poet.

“Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing that’s spirit,” he said, in *Pachciarotto*. He laid stress “on the incidents in the development of a soul,” he tells us, in his preface to *Sordello*, “little else is worth study.” This was more than a fundamental idea to Browning, it was a constitutional propensity; and it drove him to the drama. But the confession of it implies the consciousness of a mission, and the artist, at his best, knows

no mission of that kind. He is in the service of no conception that the intellect can shape or express, or of no purpose that the will can frame and fix. His rapture is as fine and careless as that of the thrush, and he is snatched up and away by themes that define themselves only in the process of creation and, in the end, escape all definition and stand forth as miracles. But this absence of purpose we do not often find in Browning. His dramatic pieces are not at leisure ; the poet himself never strolls, but is always set upon some business, even among his *Garden Fancies*.

For the same reason, there are no genuine little incidents in Browning's plays. Little things are apt to be symbolic—pin-point rays of intense light coming from afar are imprisoned in them : they suggest grave meanings : possibly, for instance, the failure of the whole life, through making love, at some moment, a merely second-best.

- Why did not you pinch a flower
 In a pellet of clay and fling it ?
Why did not I put a power
 Of thanks in a look, or sing it ? ¹

¹ *Youth and Art.*

The whole atmosphere of the plays is heavily charged with significance ; and many characters, in consequence, are, from beginning to end, in some highly strung mood. There is tragic tension in the very first words that Mildred speaks : " Sit, Henry—do not take my hand." The moral strain deepens with the next question, and it is never relaxed. No breath of fresh air from the unheeding outer world comes to break the spell, and, at the same time, to deepen, by contrast, the pathos and tragedy of Mildred's overmastering consciousness that she does not deserve, and will never hold in her arms, the happiness that seemed to stand close by.

It is, probably, this preliminary, purposive surcharging of the characters and incidents that led Dowden to say that " the dramatic genius of Browning was in the main of the static kind ; it studies with extraordinary skill and subtlety character in position ; it attains only an imperfect or laboured success with character in movement." As it stands, this dictum is unsound. Restless energy is always straining against the poet's control.

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His genius is dramatic, precisely in virtue of the sense of movement which it conveys, and the feeling that life is process and nothing else, a continuous new creation of itself carried on by itself. Even in *The Ring and the Book*, where the poet not only knows but tells the end at the beginning, the dramatic quality of movement is present. The story expands at each telling, like circles in water. The facts are transformed with each successive telling of them, by one and the other Half-Rome, Guido, Caponsacchi, Pompilia, The Pope and the lawyers. Not for a moment does the story stand still, nor does the reader feel that he is being told of past events, as in listening to an essentially epic poet, like Milton. Browning's poems are never stagnant: tragedy never hangs overhead, as in *Hamlet*, a black, motionless, delayed thunder-cloud; but the lightning is always ablaze. There are crowded happenings, and the heat and hurry of situations crashing into their consequences. Browning's genius is essentially dynamic, and there is abundant movement.

What Browning's characters lack is

objectivity—if we may borrow a term from the philosophers. Such is the intensity of his interest in “the incidents in the development of a soul” that it transfuses not only the *dramatis personæ* but the world in which they live. The outer world is not genuinely outer. It does not exist for its own sake, carrying on its own processes, “going on just the same,” whether men and women laugh or weep, live or die, utterly indifferent to every fate, distinguishing not in the least between great things and small, evil things and good, allowing “both the proudly riding and the foundering bark.” It is not a world aloof from man, non-moral and, on surface reading, non-rational, the sphere of sheer caprice and the playground of accident. The world is the stage and background for Browning’s characters and supplies the scenery they need.

What is done by his personages, therefore, is not the result of intercourse between human character and what, in itself, is an entirely natural world. And, consequently, what takes place lacks that appearance of contingency in collusion with necessity of

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which the true dramatist makes tragic use. When he is most completely under the spell of his muse, the true dramatist cannot tell beforehand what will happen to his men and women, or how they will behave. He is at the mercy of two unknowns : the inexhaustible possibilities of man's nature, and of the response which it will make to the never-ending contingencies of an indifferent outer world. He has no preconceived theory, no scheme of life, no uniformities or necessities which can be labelled : the unity of his work, as a work of art, has some more mystic source than any of these things. But we cannot quite say this of Browning. His men and women cannot be called embodiments of *a priori* conceptions, meant to illustrate a doctrine or point a moral ; and, yet, their intercourse with their fellows and interaction with the world have no genuinely fashioning potency. Nothing quite new or quite unexpected ever happens to them. They are not in a world where unexpected things are permitted to happen. Had not Macbeth *happened* to meet the witches on the moor, with the excitement of the battle

not yet subsided in his blood, he might have lived and died a loyal and victorious general. And what side-winds of mere accidents there are in *Othello* and *Hamlet*! These dramas are like life, because the fate which is irresistible comes clothed in accident and with its chaplet all awry and as careless as that of a Bacchic dancer. The accidents seem trivial, too, and might easily not have taken place or have been turned aside, until they *have* taken place. Then, and not till then, do we feel that they were meant, and that, they were as inevitable as destiny.

But Browning's plays can be seen from afar to march straightforward to their consummation ; and the world in which they take place is all too obtrusively "a moral order." The personages are, from the first, inwardly charged with some dominant passion or propensity. They are dedicated, even when they are complex, to some one form of good or of evil ; and some one misdeed stains the whole of life like ink in water. They are enveloped in their own atmosphere, and outer incidents cannot affect their career ; carried along by the powers within as if by

a driving storm ; freighted full from the first with their destiny : Pym with his love of England ; Mildred with the guilt of her innocence ; Luria with his "own East" ; Tresham with the pride of family and the 'scutcheon without a blot ; Valence with his stormy rectitude and great heart.

This is the only sense in which Browning's dramas lack movement, and his method may be called static. His characters are impervious to outward influence, except in so far as it serves to discharge what is already within. Within the inner realm of passions, emotions, volitions, ambitions, and the world which these catch up in their career, there is no lack of movement. A plenitude of powers all active are revealed by him : they co-operate, sever, mingle, collide, combine, and are all astrain—but they are all psychical. Browning places us in the parliament of the mind. It is the powers of mind to which we listen in high debate. And we are reminded by them of the fugues of Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha :

One dissertates, he is candid ;
Two must discept—has distinguished ;

Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did ;
Four protests ; Five makes a dart at the thing
wished :
Back to One, goes the case bandied.

And they require scope to declare themselves,
as they reveal the wonder-world of the human
soul.

Now, we have stated these points somewhat fully because they seem to throw light upon the whole of Browning's work as a poet. The tendency towards dwelling upon ideal issues rather than upon outer deeds, on the significance of facts for souls, and the insignificance of all things save in the soul's context, was always present in Browning ; so, also, was the tendency towards monologue, with its deliberate, ordered persistency. And both of these tendencies grew. External circumstance became, more and more, the mere garb of the inner mood ; deeds, more and more, the creatures of thoughts ; and all real values were, more and more, undisguisedly ideal ministrants to man's need of beauty, or goodness, or love and happiness.

But to say this is to admit not only that

the dramatic element in his poetry was on the wane, but that his poetry was itself becoming more deliberately reflective. And the spirit of reflection which rejects first appearances, sublimates sense and its experience into meanings, is, to say the least, as characteristic of philosophy as it is of art. It is philosophy rather than art which concentrates upon principles, and which allows facts and events to dwindle into instances of general laws. Art must value a thing for what it is in itself, not for the truth which it exemplifies. The reference of the beautiful object beyond itself to a beauty that is eternal must be, for art, as undesigned as the music of a harp swung in the wind. And, when a poet takes to illustrating themes, or when the unity of his poems, instead of being a mystic harmony of elements mingling of themselves, comes of a set purpose which can be stated in words, then, indeed, is the glory of art passing into the grey. The poet outlived the dramatist in Browning, and, if the poet did not succumb to the philosopher, it was because of the strength of the purely lyrical element in his

soul and the marvellous wealth of his sensuous and emotional endowments. His humanity was too richly veined for him to become an abstract thinker ; and certain apparent accidents of his outer life conspired with the tendencies of his poetic genius to lead them away from the regular drama.

One of these was his quarrel over *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* with Macready, for whom and at whose request this play was written. But Macready's affairs were entangled ; he would withdraw from his arrangement with Browning, was not frank with him, but shuffled : and Browning was angered, imperious and explosive. The play was produced but "damned," apparently not by the audience but by Macready's own stage and press arrangements. *The Times* pronounced it "one of the most faulty dramas we ever beheld," and *The Athenaeum* called it "a puzzling and unpleasant business," and the characters inscrutable and abhorrent. This was in 1843.

The quarrel with Macready was not the poet's only unpleasant experience of the stage. Soon after this incident, Charles

Kean negotiated with Browning for a suitable play, and, in March, 1844, *Colombe's Birthday* was read to him and approved. But Kean asked that it should be left with him, unpublished, till the Easter of the following year. Browning, however, thought the long delay unreasonable, was, possibly, doubtful of the actor's good faith and resolved to publish the play at once. It was not acted till 1853, when it was produced by Phelps with Helen Faucit as heroine and ran for a fortnight. But it was reviewed on publication by Forster—who said that he abominated the tastes of Browning as much as he respected his genius. Forster repented, called on Browning and was “very profuse of graciocities”; but their friendship had received a fatal injury. Browning concluded that there was too much “spangle” and “smutch” in connection with actors, and wrote no more for the stage.

During the years 1844–5, Browning made a series of contributions to *Hood's Magazine*. The series included *The Flight of the Duchess* and *The Bishop orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*. The poet, having gone to

Italy in 1844, and having visited the grave of Shelley, had turned into the little church of Saint Prassede near Santa Maria Maggiore.

Returning to England before the end of the year, he read Elizabeth Barrett's newly published *Poems*. They contained *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, in which he found his work mentioned with that of Tennyson and of Wordsworth, and a reference to his own "heart blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity." Elizabeth Barrett had previously, in a series of articles on English poets in *The Athenæum*, placed Browning among "high and gifted spirits"; and he had approved of her first series of articles on the early Greek Christian poets. Moreover, each knew of the other through Kenyon, Elizabeth Barrett's second cousin, schoolfellow of Browning's father and the special providence of both Robert Browning and his wife. Kenyon encouraged Browning to express to Elizabeth Barrett his admiration of her poems. The poet wrote to her with the unrestrained freedom of his most magnanimous character, telling her that he "loved her verses with all his heart"; and his letter, the letter "of the author of

Paracelsus and king of the mystics," "threw her into ecstasies." They became intimate through a correspondence which was at first dictated by mood and opportunity, and, afterwards, in accordance with formal "contract." On May 20, 1845, after the lapse of a winter and a spring, Browning came and saw her for the first time, a "little hero, which did not rise from the sofa, pale ringleted face, great, eager, wistful eyes," and, as Elizabeth Barrett said, "he never went away again." His declaration of love followed, prompt and decisive as a thunder-clap. It was countered with a refusal that was absolute, but all for his sake, and followed by "the triumph of a masterful passion and will which could not be put aside."

The circumstances are too remarkable, and meant too much for both the poets not to require a brief recounting.

Elizabeth Barrett was born at Coxhoe Hall, Durham, on March 6, 1806, the eldest of the eleven children of Edward Moulton Barrett, a West Indian planter. When she was still an infant, the family moved to

Hope End, Herefordshire, the place with which the early memories recorded in *Aurora Leigh*, *The Lost Bower* and other poems are associated. Until she was about fifteen years of age, she was healthy and vigorous, although "slight and sensitive"; and she was a good horsewoman. But, either in endeavouring to saddle her pony for herself, or in riding, she injured her spine; and the hurt was the occasion, if not the cause, of her being treated as an incurable invalid by her father—so long as she was under his roof.

From Hope End, the family removed first to Sidmouth, afterwards to 74 Gloucester Place, and, finally, to Wimpole Street, London, where Browning first came to see her. The marriage took place on September 12, 1846; and, a week later, they were on the way to Italy, where they made their permanent home in Casa Guidi, Florence.

The Battle of Marathon, Elizabeth Barrett's juvenile poem, was followed, in 1826, by *An Essay on Mind and other Poems*, a volume which bears in the very title the stamp of Pope, though its authoress, then and always, was quite unqualified to imitate

his terse neatness. Then, in 1833, came *Prometheus Bound*, a translation from Æschylus, with which the translator herself came to be so thoroughly dissatisfied that she suppressed it, so far as she was able, and substituted for it a second translation, which was published in 1850, in the same volume as *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. *The Seraphim and other Poems* was published in 1838, and, finally, in 1844, the two volumes of *Poems*. No poet ever had less of the Greek spirit of measure and proportion, though she was widely read in Greek literature and delighted in its fair forms. Nor was anyone more unlike Pope. Her work, in fact, was as chaotic and confused as it was luxurious and improvident. Her *Seraphim* is overstrained and misty ; her *Drama of Exile* is an uninteresting allegory ; nearly all her shorter poems are too long, for she did not know how to omit, or when to stop. Few, if any, poets have sinned more grievously or frequently against the laws of metre and rime.

It was natural and inevitable that the influence of her love for Browning should

transfigure her poetry as well as transform her life. In consequence of it, there is one work (and possibly one only) whose quality is unique, and whose worth is permanent, and not easily computed. This is her *Sonneis from the Portuguese*. They had been composed by her during the period of the courtship. Browning knew of them for the first time when, "one morning, early in 1847, Mrs. Browning stole quietly after breakfast into the room where her husband worked, thrust some manuscript into his pocket, and then hastily withdrew."¹ An amazing revelation even to him they must have been of the seraphic intensity of her love.

The form of the sonnet had helped Elizabeth Barrett (as it helped Wordsworth at times) to avoid her besetting sins. Extravagance and diffuseness are not so possible under its rigid rules. On the other hand, the intoxication of her passion helped to secure her against the flatness of the commonplace. They were first privately printed as *Sonnets by E. B. B.*, and, three years later, published under their present title. These

¹ *The Life of Robert Browning* by Griffin and Minchin.

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forty-four sonnets, unequal as they are, make Elizabeth Browning's title to fame secure and go some way towards explaining, if not also justifying, the esteem of her contemporaries for her poetry. She was deemed the greatest of English poetesses, perhaps rightly ; her name was also suggested (with Tennyson's but without her husband's) for the poet laureateship on the death of Wordsworth. In March, 1849, the Brownings' only child, Robert Wiedemann Barrett, was born, and, shortly afterwards, Robert Browning's mother died, leaving him long depressed. The summers of 1851 and 1852 were spent in England. In the former year, on their return journey to Italy, they travelled as far as Paris with Carlyle. There, among other celebrities, they met George Sand, and, also, Joseph Milsand, who had recently written of Browning in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. Milsand's friendship was one of the most precious in Browning's life. *Quel homme extraordinaire !* he is reported to have said of the poet, *son centre n'est pas au milieu*. The winter of 1853-4 was spent, by way of variety, at Rome. Of the

numerous journeyings from Florence during the remaining years, it is only necessary to record that, in the summer of 1855, the two poets carried to England the MS. of *Men and Women* and a great part of that of *Aurora Leigh*. Browning completed his volume by the addition of *One Word More*, which is dated London, September, 1855. During this visit, Tennyson, in the house of Browning, read aloud his *Maud* and Browning read *Fra Lippo Lippi*, while Dante Rossetti listened and sketched him—Tennyson, according to W. M. Rossetti, “mouthing out his hollow o’s and a’s,” while Browning’s voice laid stress on all the light and shade of character, its conversational points, its dramatic give and take. They joined Kenyon at West Cowes, and Elizabeth Browning wrote the last pages of *Aurora Leigh* under his roof and dedicated the poem to him.

On their return to Florence, they received news of the immediate and very great success of the poem; and Browning, whose *Men and Women* failed either to attract the public or to please the critics, rejoiced with a great joy in her triumph.

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While the Brownings were in England, Daniel D. Home, the most notorious of American exponents of spiritualism, held a séance at which they were present. A wreath that "happened" to be on the table was raised by "spirit" hands and placed on Elizabeth Browning's brow—the medium's own feet operating also, Browning maintained. Home subsequently visited Florence; and spiritualistic manifestations became for Elizabeth Browning and some of her friends a matter of profoundly serious interest, and for Browning himself an intolerable irritant. Nothing that Browning wrote surpasses *Mr. Sludge, "The Medium"* in dramatic power. It exposes more powerfully even than Blougram and Juan and Hohenstiel-Schwangau that corruption of the soul by a lying and selfish life which infects its whole world, making of it a twilight region in which truth and error, right and wrong are inextricably confused, and nothing said is either sincere or insincere. Sludge, at least in some respects, is the greatest of Browning's magnificent casuists, who themselves are new figures in poetic literature:

and, no doubt, it owes something of its vigour to his distasteful experience of Home. But Home was not the subject of the poem. Sludge the medium is as universal and impersonal a creation as Falstaff; and, though Browning "stamped on the floor in a frenzy of rage at the way some believers and mediums deceived Mrs. Browning," he allows Sludge to be himself and to have his own say in so impartial a way as to make the poem a striking revelation of the strength of the poet's dramatic genius.

In 1859, Elizabeth Browning fell alarmingly ill: political events—the war, the armistice and conference at Villafranca and Napoleon's bargain excited her too much. Browning nursed her, and took charge, also, of his son's lessons. To these, he added the charge of the affairs of Landor, and of Landor himself—a most difficult and delicate task. Landor had quarrelled in his volcanic way with his family, with whom he lived at Fiesole, and appeared homeless, penniless and with nothing but the clothes he stood in at Casa Guidi. Browning took him into his house, arranged and managed his affairs for him,

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and was loving and tolerant with that wide generosity of spirit which make friends of men of the most untoward temperament. Landor loved Browning, and was tame under his hand, while Browning amused Elizabeth by talking of Landor's "gentleness and sweetness."

Notwithstanding the "transformation" which her marriage was said to have wrought, Elizabeth Browning's health was never completely restored, or secure—"I have never seen a human frame so nearly a transparent veil for a celestial and immortal spirit," said Hillard of her, when he saw her in Florence. During these years, her strength gradually waned, and on June 29, 1861, suddenly, without any presentiment on her part or fear on his, she passed away. Her death, it is supposed, was hastened by that of Cavour on the sixth of the same month. She had said of him, "if tears or blood could have saved him to us, he should have had mine." She was buried in Florence, and a tablet on the walls of Casa Guidi expresses the gratitude of the city for her advocacy of Italian freedom. Browning's sorrow was

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as deep as his life; but it was borne in his manly fashion. In order "to live and work and write," he had "to break up everything and go to England." He never returned to Florence, nor did he visit Italy again until 1878.

Although they lived at first in happy seclusion, "soundless and stirless hermits," as Elizabeth Browning said, still, no one followed with fuller sympathy the changing fortunes of Italy. But Browning sang neither its hopes nor its sorrows—"Nationality was not an effectual motive with him"—nor did its contemporary politics mean so much for him as a poet as its mediæval art. But it was otherwise with his wife. She responded to what was present. Even the art of which we hear in her letters is not the art of the Vatican or the Capitol, but Story's, or Gibson's, or Page's. She was profoundly moved by the agitation for freedom. Italy was the land where she herself first knew freedom, and her emotions swept her into song. Of the four publications of her later life, two are entirely Italian in theme—*Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) and *Poems before*

Congress (1860). And both are political.

It was a time of revolution when the Brownings settled in Italy, and the ferment continued throughout the whole period of their married life. *Casa Guidi Windows* dealt with the earlier phases of the movement for liberation. In its later stages, the part taken in it by Napoleon III and the equivocal character of his motives and actions were matter of intense interest to them. Elizabeth Browning was his devoted defender; Browning was alternately critical and condemnatory. Even "the annexation of Savoy and Nice" only momentarily shook her faith in him. Browning summed up the situation by saying of Napoleon's part in the Italian war that "it was a great action but he has taken eighteen pence for it, which is a pity." They had agreed to write of Napoleon and publish jointly. Elizabeth Browning's labours resulted in *Poems before Congress*; on the annexation, Browning dropped the project and destroyed what he had written. But he came back to the subject, during that period when it delighted him most to explore the intricacies of

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ambiguous souls whose morality was "pied" and intellects casuistical ; and he produced *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*.

Both *Casa Guidi Windows* and *Poems before Congress* illustrate the difficulty of lifting contemporary politics into poetry. Neither these nor the aftermath in her posthumous *Last Poems* (1862) have added to Elizabeth Browning's literary reputation.

It remains to notice the longest and the most ambitious of her poems—*Aurora Leigh*, with its eleven thousand lines of blank verse. It was the literary venture on which she staked her fortune ; in her dedication of it to Kenyon, she calls it "the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered." The readers of her time agreed with her ; critics were unanimous, and their praise was pitched high ; the first edition was exhausted in a fortnight, and a third was required within a few months. Later readers have become much more temperate. It is a novel in iambic decasyllables. The story is a thin thread on which are strung the opinions of the writer on all manner of

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matters—educational, social, artistic, ethical.

Elizabeth Browning's gifts were lyrical. She was essentially a subjective poet, in the sense that the events she described and the characters she drew were saturated with her own sympathies. All the characters in *Aurora Leigh* are entirely subordinate to the heroine, and the heroine, however little Elizabeth Browning intended it, is the unsubstantial shadow of herself. She had no dramatic or narrative genius. The world in which her characters move is always created on the pattern of her own inner life, for she dipped her brush in her own emotions. Her later poems show some improvement in technique, and some of them are enriched by her life in Italy and by the influence of her husband, which was very great: for it is not *Pippa Passes* only "which counts for something in *Aurora Leigh*," nor even *Paracelsus*, whose faith is paraphrased in hundreds of its lines. But they contain nothing equal to *Rhyme of the Duchess May*, *Cowper's Grave* and *The Cry of the Children*. If she is remembered permanently, it will be, as a poet, by reason of the expression she gave to a

mother's love in *A Child's Grave at Florence*, and, even more securely, by the sublime passion of the love of wife for husband in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

The Italian period of Browning's life was comparatively barren. It has been suggested that this was due, in part, to the fact that the climate of Italy lowered his vitality; in part, to the unpopularity of his works. Moreover, he took to drawing, and to modelling in clay, copying masterpieces with intense pleasure. Only two publications of verse marked this period—*Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (1850) and *Men and Women* (1855). He also wrote at this time an essay on Shelley, by way of introduction to *Certain Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1852), which were afterwards found to be fabrications. The essay was evidently influenced by Mil-sand's article on Browning himself, in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. It accentuates in the same way the distinction between subjective and objective poetry, and discusses Shelley's work with much skill and insight.

In *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, critics discover clear evidence of the influence of

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Elizabeth Browning's devout Christian faith. Browning had been interested in religion all his life : for the "atheism" which he caught from Shelley was as superficial and temporary as the vegetarianism. *Pauline, Paracelsus, Pippa Passes*, all the principal poems of the early period bear witness to his sense of the profound significance of religion. *Christmas Eve* deals with contemporary attitudes towards Christianity — dissent, the higher criticism, Roman Catholicism—with a characteristic preference for the first. *Easter Day* is more restrained and stern, more full of lyric beauty and more searching in its truth. It deals with the inner nature of the faith that is religious—religious and not epicurean or materialistic—not seeking its evidences in outward happenings or its worth in the complacency which it brings, the zest it gives to joy, or the bitterness it takes away from sorrow. Both poems are dramatic ; neither is to be regarded as the poet's confession of faith ; nevertheless, they express the profoundest of his spiritual convictions, which centred upon the most sublime of all religious hypotheses, namely,

that of the omnipotence and omnipresence of a Christlike God, the divine power and work of love. *Saul*, especially the second part, which contains the prophecy of Christianity, *Clean*, *Karshish*, bear witness to the same conceptions—the omnipresent wonder that transcends definition, and is yet the sole sure light whereby man can walk and find safe footing.

Elizabeth Browning's influence may be detected, also, in the poems which treat of love. The original *Dramatic Lyrics* (the *Dramatic Lyrics* as they stood before the poems transferred thereto from *Men and Women*) included *Cristina* and *In a Gondola*, and among *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* there appeared *The Lost Mistress*. But the collection which included *A Woman's Last Word*, *Any Wife to Any Husband*, *The Last Ride Together*, *One Way of Love*, among many more, was certainly a richer rendering of the marvel of love than any of his previous works. It is probable that no single poet, in any country, so rendered the variety of its phases and the abundance of its power—its triumph, its failure; its victory over

the world, its defeat by the world ; its passion and poignancy ; its psychical subtlety and its romance, and the immensity of its spiritual significance, whether in the life of the soul or in the outer cosmos.

Many of the poems in *Men and Women* of which the scene can be determined have reference to Italy. But it is doubtful whether his residence in Italy influenced Browning's choice of subjects to any great extent. "He was deeply Italianized before he went to live in Italy." To say nothing of *Sordello* and *Pippa Passes*, there was an Italian group in the original *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, which is almost as conspicuous as that of the original *Men and Women*. After *The Ring and the Book*, Italian subjects become both more rare and less important.

On leaving Italy, Browning settled in London. With the change of residence came a change of habit. His Italian life, quiet in the early years, had become gradually much more social. In Florence, in Rome and during their visits to London, the charm of Elizabeth Browning, and Robert Brown-

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ing's own genius for noble friendship, brought them into intimate relations with the most gifted of their time. After her death, until the spring of 1863, he retired within himself, and his life, as he said, was "as grey as the London sky." Then, he thought that way of life morbid and unworthy, resolved to accept every suitable invitation and, thenceforth, his figure was familiar in the circles of the lovers of literature, although, except for a very few friends, all women, none ever saw of Browning more than "a splendid surface."

In 1863, he was much agitated by a proposal to publish a life of Elizabeth Browning, with letters. He turned savagely upon "the blackguards" who would "thrust their paws into his bowels," and he destroyed the greater part of his own correspondence. But he preserved the letters that had passed between himself and his wife prior to their marriage; with the result that hardly anyone, except, perhaps, Carlyle, protested more strongly against the intrusion of spies into his life's intimacies, and had the inner shrine more ruthlessly laid bare. He, how-

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ever, freely gave to the public what had been intended for them. He republished Elizabeth Browning's prose essays on the Greek Christian poets and the English poets in 1863; and, two years later, made a selection from her poems, and expressed his delight at the popularity which made it necessary.

For three years in succession, he spent the summer months at Ste Marie, near Pornic, where he worked at his *Dramatis Personæ*, published in 1864. Part of 1866 and 1867 was spent at Croisic, the name of which is linked with *The Two Poets of Croisic*, as he linked that of Pornic with *Gold Hair*, *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* and the gipsy woman of *Fifine at the Fair*.

Browning was at the height of his power during this period. Nowhere is his poetic work so uniformly great as in *Dramatis Personæ* (1864); and there is no doubt that *The Ring and the Book* is the most magnificent of all his achievements, in spite of its inequalities. Critics miss in *Dramatis Personæ* something of the lightness and brightness and early morning charm of

Pippa Passes and of some of his earlier *Men and Women*; and they find in it, not any trace of the pathetic fallacy, yet a lingering echo of the brooding sorrow for his life's loss. It was later in the day; the world was more commonplace; the outlook more desolate and man's failure less tinged with glory; women were more homely, love was less ethereal; and the stuff to be idealized through being better known by a wiser love was more stubborn. "The summer had stopped," and "the sky was deranged." But the autumn had come, bringing a richer harvest in *Dramatis Personæ*. The significance of man's life, and of the clash of circumstance which elicited it, was deeper as well as more grave. The world's worn look disappears when it is seen in the great context in which it stands—"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist," says Abt Vogler. Man has himself "a flash of the will that can," for he can use its distraught elements of life to a moral purpose, and weld them in a spiritual harmony—out of three sounds make, "not a fourth sound, but a star." *Prospice*,

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Rabbi Ben Ezra, A Death in the Desert, even *Mr. Sludge, "The Medium"* and *Caliban upon Setebos*, are strong with a controlled ethical passion for what is real and true as things stand, and by interest in the issues which are ultimate; and, with this realism, natural and spiritual, in both kinds, there is blended an imaginative splendour which transfigures even "the least of all mankind," when we "look at his head and heart"; and

see what I tell you—nature dance
About each man of us, retire, advance,
As though the pageant's end were to enhance
His worth, and—once the life, his product, gained—
Roll away elsewhere.

It is a permanent theme, its echoes are to be heard all the way to *Asolando*—this wash of circumstance around man's soul which yet maintains its mastery over all the play of the waves; and nowhere is it rendered more finely than in *Dramatis Personæ* and its *Epilogue*.

The Edinburgh Review found it a "subject of amazement that poems of so obscure and uninviting a character should find numerous readers"; and there were other critics

besides Frederick Tennyson who still thought Browning's poetry "the most grotesque conceivable." But the situation had, in truth, changed. Browning's admirers were no longer confined to pre-Raphaelites and "young men at the Universities." A second edition of *Dramatis Personæ* was called for within the same year as the first. And the reception accorded to *The Ring and the Book* was still more favourable. At last, Browning was coming into his kingdom. It had taken long: so late as 1867, he spoke of himself as "the most unpopular poet that ever was."

There was an interval of four years between *Dramatis Personæ* and *The Ring and the Book*. But the theme had interested him from the moment when he came upon the "old, square, yellow book" on an old bookstall in Florence—the parchment-bound tale of the trial of an Italian noble for the murder of his wife. He saw its dramatic possibilities when he stood on the balcony of Casa Guidi, in June, 1860, at night, watching the storm. But it lay long working in his mind, and the sorrow of the following year led him to abandon the idea of writing, and he suggested

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the subject to two of his friends. In September, 1862, he recurred to it, spoke of "my new poem that is about to be," "the Roman murder story." He began to write it about 1864, and the poem grew steadily, for it became his crowning venture and he gave it regularly every day "three quiet, early morning hours." It was published in four volumes, the first of which appeared in November, 1868; and the others during the three months following.

Many things concurred to make the story attractive to Browning. He had inherited a taste for tales of crime from his father; the situation was ambiguous and, as regards the priest and the girl-wife, it left room for a most beautiful, as well as for a sordid, explanation, and, therefore, it appealed both to Browning's love of argument and to his ethical idealism; moreover, opinion in Rome was divided, and the popular mind was on its trial; there was the possibility that the truth "told for once for the church, and dead against the world, the flesh, and the devil"; and the story, in its essence, was not a common drab, but glorious—the romance of the

young priest and Pompilia was "a gift of God, who showed for once how he would have the world go white."

It was inevitable that such a theme should set free all the powers of Browning's spirit; but it borrowed sublimity and a sacred loveliness from another quarter. For, undoubtedly, the "poem which enshrined Pompilia was instinct with reminiscence." "With all its abounding vitality it was yet commemorative and memorial."¹ When he wrote of "the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me"; of "the one blossom that made me proud at eve"; of a "life companioned by the woman there"; of living and seeing her learn, and learning by her, can there be doubt as to who lent to these utterances their pathetic beauty?

Nor is it fanciful to find in Caponsacchi something of the poet himself—more, perhaps, than in any other character he created. There was his own tempestuousness, much that a wise old pope could find "amiss," "blameworthy," "ungainly," "discordant," "infringement manifold" of convention;

¹ Herford.

but there was also a "symmetric soul within," "championship of God at first blush," "prompt, cheery thud of glove on ground," answering "ringingly the challenge of the false knight." What are these qualities, with the ardour of a great love and the headlong and utter devotion of a large-hearted manhood, except the poet's own? Caponsacchi's

I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long,

is inspired by the manly recoil of Browning and his refusal to be crushed by his sorrow. But the dream of having his "lyric Love" by his side has been broken; and the bereaved poet is not perceptible in the "drudging student," who "trims his lamp," "draws the patched gown close" and awakes "to the old solitary nothingness." The last words are a promise of this priest to "pass content, from such communion"; and Browning would fain have come back into the world of men as if his wound had healed. But the truth breaks out—

O great, just, good God! Miserable me!

There was, for both priest and poet, the rule in the world of a love that wrapped all things round about, and yet, somehow, also, there were sorrows that knew neither shores nor shoals.

To pass all the parts of this great poem under review is not possible, and to estimate the relative poetic worth of its several parts —*Caponsacchi, Pompilia, The Pope and Guido* —is not necessary ; there are kinds as well as degrees of perfection, and comparison is sometimes absurd. The possibility of justifying the structure of the poem as a whole will remain doubtful ; and the macaronic speeches of the lawyers, and some parts of what Rome said, have no real artistic value. But the poem is unique in its excellence as well as in its defects.

During the six years which followed *The Ring and the Book*, Browning wrote nothing but long poems—with the exception of *Hervé Riel*, which was published for a charitable purpose. *Balaustion's Adventure* appeared in 1871. Balaustion had the *Alcestis* of Euripides by heart, and, by rendering that “strangest, saddest, sweetest song,”

saves her own life and wins for the ship refuge in the harbour of Syracuse. Balaustion's character has the charm of Pippa ; Hercules, re-created by Browning, is magnificent—with “the gay cheer” of his great voice, heralding gladness as he helped the world, “the human and divine, i” the weary, happy face of him, half god, half man, which made the god-part god the more (a favourite and recurrent conception). In *Aristophanes' Apology*, Balaustion is reintroduced, and we have a second transcript from Euripides—and, with it, above all else, the incomparable portrait of Aristophanes. “No ignoble presence” : “mind a-wantoning,” it is true, but “at ease,” all the same, “of undisputed mastery over the body’s brood, those appetites.”

A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.

The transcribed portions of both poems have only secondary value ; and the translation is said to be often tame, literal and even awkward. The *Agamemnon of Aeschylus* (1877) is said to be an even less acceptable rendering : “exact” and unintelligible.

It was undertaken on the suggestion of Carlyle and dedicated to him. One would like to know what mood Carlyle was in, when he gave his advice, telling Browning "ye ought to translate the whole of the Greek tragedians—that's your vocation." Browning was better left to sport in his own way, in his own element, like his "King of Pride," "through deep to deep," "churning the blackness hoary." There is ample evidence of his wide, intimate knowledge of the literature of Athens, and of his love of its methods ; but his strength was not similar to that of the Greeks ; and he cannot be said to have made a significant contribution either to the knowledge or to the love, in England, of the Greek drama.

As if Browning were under compulsion to squander the popularity gained by *Dramatis Personæ* and *The Ring and the Book*, and with both hands, there appeared, besides these Greek poems, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* (1871), *Finfine at the Fair* (1872), *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country or Turf and Towers* (1873) and *The Inn Album* (1875). Either for its theme, or for the treatment of

it, or for both theme and treatment, every one of these poems failed to please. *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, a monologue over a cigar, illustrated by connecting blot with blot on a "soiled bit" of paper, is the mean and tortuous plea of a weak, possibly well-meaning, certainly discredited, politician. Its hero, Napoleon III, was hardly great enough to be tragical, or even picturesque. *Fifine at the Fair* shocked and alienated good people. It was supposed to be a defence of illicit love; and its style was thought as turgid as its morality was false. *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* is a novel in verse; the story of a Paris jeweller and his mistress. It has been defended on the ground that, as a strong treatment of the ugly, it makes the ugly uglier! More sanely it has been disapproved as "versified special correspondence," "from which every pretence of poetry is usually remote." *The Inn Album* once more deals with illicit passion, and, once more, is "a novel in verse." Its hero is all tinsel, and "rag and feather sham," irredeemably mean, smart and shallow, a cheat at cards, growing old amid his

“ scandalous successes”—a figure, one might say, better let be by the poet. The heroine, the betrayed girl, is a genuinely tragical figure. And the tragedy is final, remorseless; for she marries a parish priest who is unloving and unloved, dull, elderly, poor, conscientious, whom she “used to pity” till she “learned what woes are pity-worth.” Him, in an ugly, filthy village, sterile as if “sown with salt,” she helps to drug and dose his flock with the doctrine of heaven and hell—the latter “made explicit.” Much of this poem is powerful; it contains one passage strangely Shakespearean in quality: that in which the elder lady describes her lost love, when its reality was questioned by her betrayer. As a whole, however, it cannot compare with *Fifine at the Fair*, either in range of reflective power, or in wealth of artistic splendour, or in the weight of the issues which are called forth. It was not without reason that Browning spoke of *Fifine* as “the most metaphysical and boldest he had written since *Sordello*”; and not in all respects was Swinburne’s dictum wrong—“This is far better than anything Brown-

ing has yet written." Its main defect is that in it, even more than usual, " Browning has presumed too much upon his reader's insight " and taken no pains to " obviate confusions he would have held to be impossible had they occurred to his mind."

His experience of his critics—" the inability of the human goose to do other than either cackle or hiss"—led him to banter them in *Pacchiarotto and how he worked in Distemper* (1876), which tells the whimsical tale of the artist who tried to reform his fellows. The poem is genial and boisterous and, in its rime, brilliant and absurd ; an instance of another of the poet's ways of Aristophanic wantoning. In *At the "Mermaid"* and *House* and other poems in the same volume, the aloofness of the inner life, the deepest and real, is brought before us ; and how, in the last resort, the world of men, mingle with them as he might, was nothing but " world without "—

as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours.

He lived and he sang, and he was for " one " only ; for the rest of men, there was but

his self's surface and the garb, and what it pleased him to dole.

The fact that, unmistakably, he speaks of himself, mingles and involves himself in his creations, shows that Browning's dramatic power was beginning to decline. The plea that the "utterances" are those of "imaginary characters" becomes less and less valid; for the imagined characters are unsubstantial, the shadows thrown by the poet himself. But there is one theme which, change as life's seasons may, remains for him a perennial source of perfect song. In *St. Martin's Summer*, where much that is green had turned sere, and the heart had lost its enterprise, in *Numpholeptos* and in other poems in this volume, love, which is now a memory of what was, and a wistful longing for what must yet be, retains all its mystic power and breaks into lyric poetry of unabated beauty.

In 1877, Browning visited the Savoy Alps; and there his companion, Miss Egerton Smith, died suddenly, as she was making ready for a mountain expedition with him.

In the following year, *La Saisiaz* was

published, a commemorative poem which states and tests the arguments for and against the immortality of the soul, and pronounces judgment. But the pronouncement, though affirmative, is not untinged with doubt, and it has the fatal weakness of being, at best, valid or conclusive only for the poet. Here, as elsewhere, there is a sophistic touch in Browning's philosophy ; and it was not in the intelligence, but in the potency of love that he trusted. In the same volume as *La Saisiaz* there appeared *The Two Poets of Croisic*, in which, once more, the poet gambols, mocking, this time, at fame.

In the autumn of 1878, for the first time after the death of his wife, Browning went to Italy ; and he repeated his visits every year until the close of his life. On his first journey, he stayed for some weeks at a hotel near the summit of the Splügen Pass. *Ivan Ivánovitch* and *Ned Bratts* were written here, and the volume entitled *Dramatic Idyls* (1879) contains these and *Martin Rolph*, and *Pheidippides*, both magnificently told stories, the latter carrying the reader

back to the tale *How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*. The second series of *Dramatic Idyls* contained the dramatic stories of "the foolishness," which is love, of Muléykeh's Arab owner, and Clive's confession to fear, with its startling turn. *Jocoseria*, published in 1883, contains two great poems, namely, *Ixion* and the lyric *Never the Time and the Place*—where longing love finds once more its perfect utterance. Then came *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884) and *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day* (1887), and, finally, *Asolando* (1890). The garb of Ferishtah is eastern : he is a Persian sage ; and the allegories and parables have, also, an eastern flavour. But Ferishtah is only a name, and the sage who speaks the wisdom of common sense through his lips, illustrating his convictions regarding moral matters, pain, prayer, asceticism, punishment, by reference to common objects—the sun, a melon-seller, cherries, two camels, plot-culture—is Browning himself. The poems are simple, direct and pleasing ; they contain a practical faith touched with theoretical doubt. The conclusions are all

tentative and insecure, so long as the heart does not lead to them, and love is silent. The lyrics that intervene between the dialogues are exquisite.

Browning was seventy-five years old when he published *Parleyings*; and the "importance" of the people with whom he parleys comes from the fact that they carried him back to his boyhood's industrious happiness in his father's library. There he learnt of "Artistry's Ideal" from "the prodigious book" of Gerard de Lairesse; and he remembered his mother playing Avison's grand march. The poems are vigorous, the learning displayed in them is immense and they abound in intellectual vitality; but the personages are as shadowy as they are voluble, and the poetic glory has left the grey.

Browning's health was becoming more uncertain, but he continued both his social life in London and his journeys south to the mountains and to Italy. In 1887, his son married, and bought the Rezzonico palace, Venice, and thither, for two summers more, the poet returned. He also went

back (after forty years) to Asolo, and lived in a house there on the old town-wall ; and the place which he had loved from the days of *Pippa* renewed its charm for him. He died at Venice, on December 12, 1889, and was buried in the poets' corner of Westminster Abbey, on the last day of the year.

He had not expected death, but, to the last, was full of projects, his courage unabated and his enterprise not weary ; and his last words, the great *Epilogue* with which, in *Asolando*, he closed the collected gleanings of his genius, fitly express the faith which made his life heroic.

*The Ethical Idea in Shakespeare*¹

THE British Academy was told the other day that "Shakespeare is not a moral teacher." The speaker was an eminent literary man, who has little regard for paradox and much for truth. "Shakespeare," he says, "lets morality take care of itself; what he sets before us is life. Cruelty, falsehood, inhumanity, treachery, are represented by him, as are heroism, truth, self-sacrifice: but they are neither approved nor condemned; they are only displayed, as causes with their effects, or it may be with their strange apparent effectlessness. Lady Capulet's plan to have Romeo poisoned in Mantua, Cymbeline's order for the massacre in cold blood of all his Roman prisoners, are presented without

¹ The Spence Watson lecture delivered to the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Literary and Philosophical Society, 1918.

comment, and produce no result. The lesson, if it can be called one, of Shakespeare (as of Sophocles) is that we should draw no lessons, but see and feel and understand. Their attitude towards the virtues is that they are virtues, that good is different from evil. If it is part of the scheme of things (as does not always appear) that there is a power which works for righteousness, that is only one fact of life like others. Shakespeare does not teach ; he illuminates.”¹

“ There is no moral lesson to be read, except accidentally, in any of Shakespeare’s tragedies,” says another critic, whose writing is always brilliant and frequently sincere. “ Here ” (that is, in the tragedies) “ we have to do with an earthquake, and good conduct is of no avail. Morality is not denied ; it is overwhelmed and tossed aside by the inrush of the sea. There is no moral lesson to be read, except accidentally, in any of Shakespeare’s tragedies.”²

“ When Shakespeare grappled with the

¹ Mackail’s *Shakespeare After Three Hundred Years*, p. 19.

² Raleigh’s *Shakespeare*, p. 197.

ultimate problems of life he had the help of no talisman or magic script. Doctrine, theory, metaphysics, morals — how should these help a man at the last encounter? Men forge themselves these weapons, and glory in them, only to find them an encumbrance at the hour of need. . . . Where pain and sorrow come, reason is powerless, good counsel turns to passion, and philosophy is put to shame.”¹

“When we are immersed in a tragedy” (says Mr. Bradley, one of the greatest, possibly *the* greatest of all Shakespearian critics), “we feel towards dispositions, actions and persons such feelings as attraction and repulsion, pity, wonder, fear, horror, perhaps hatred; but we do not *judge*. This is a point of view which emerges only when, in reading a play, we slip, by our own fault or the dramatist’s, from the tragic position, or when, in thinking about the play afterwards, we fall back on our everyday legal and moral notions. But tragedy does not belong, any more than religion belongs, to the sphere of these

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

notions ; neither does the imaginative attitude in presence of it.”¹

“ We may, if we like, derive any number of improving lessons from his works,” says a fourth critic eminent for both learning and sanity. “ But he is an artist, not a moralist ; and he wrote for the story, not for the moral.”²

I have indulged in somewhat long quotations, before saying anything myself. But you will, no doubt, find a sufficient apology for me in the weight and the unanimity of the opinions cited, and in the importance of the issues they raise.

They are all concerned about the same thing. It is that the readers of Shakespeare should read him rightly. By that I believe they mean that we should read his plays in the same attitude of mind as that in which he wrote them, namely, in the attitude of the looker-on at life, moved by the spectacle to laughter or to tears, to pity or horror, love or hate ; but making no com-

¹ Bradley’s *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 32, 33.

² M. W. MacCallum’s *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays*, p. 468.

ment, passing no judgment, at least no moral judgment, drawing no lesson, forming no theory. If we draw a lesson, it must be after the imaginative intercourse has passed away with all the emotions it has raised ; and if we form a theory, a doctrine or philosophy, it must be after we have closed the book ; and we must never bring it with us when we open it again. If we do not come to Shakespeare in this spirit and manner, we shall find in his plays what is not there, and overlook what is.

It is because I agree with the critics in their purpose that I desire to examine the means they advocate in order to attain it. And I wish to scrutinize still more specially the assumption as to the nature of Morality and its relation to Art which, I believe, underlies the warning that they give.

You will observe that each of them speaks of certain contrasts. On one side we have "morality," left by Shakespeare to take care of itself ; on the other, "life," which "he sets before" us. On one side, seeing, feeling, understanding ; on the other, approving, condemning, learning lessons. On

one side the power which works for righteousness, if there be one; on the other, the scheme of things, the facts of life as a whole. On one side, the limited moral world, the frailty of moral custom, the futility of reason, doctrine, theory; on the other, the earthquake that destroys, the sea that rushes in and overwhelms, powers, passions, elemental forces which are greater things than man. For (we are told) it is "not true to say that in these tragedies character is destiny."¹ And the whole situation is summed up in one weighty delivery: "Tragedy does not belong, any more than religion belongs, to the sphere of these notions" (i.e. the legal and moral), "neither does the imaginative attitude in presence of it." Therefore we must not draw moral lessons from Shakespeare, or if we do so it must only be accidentally, and *after* the æsthetic and passionate extremes have died down, and the world is the habitual, prosaic, common moral grey once more.

Now, there is one way only of dealing adequately and effectively with these views:

¹ Raleigh, p. 197.

The Ethical Idea in Shakespeare

and that is to examine the psychological and the philosophical doctrines which underlie them. For it is hardly necessary to say that such doctrines *do* underlie them. Neither the literary critic, nor any most plain man, can avoid having them. We imbibe them from the traditions amongst which we are born and bred, and the ordinary literature which we read ; they become a part of the thinking apparatus of the mind, and elements of the very structure of the soul. To have no theories is to have no principles of knowledge or conduct, and no point of view from which to look at life and make the most of it. Without such principles to guide and rule our experience, our thoughts, our purposes, could have no coherence. And mental incoherence is compatible with neither Art, nor Knowledge, nor Morality. Where there is no ordered and more or less systematic experience, there is neither Beauty, Truth nor Goodness ; but Contradiction and Chaos.

I can hardly on this present occasion do all that is necessary towards examining the philosophy which is implied in the views

we have quoted. One or two remarks may serve our needs just now.

And first I should like to say that the alleged antagonism between doctrine or theory and poetic appreciation, or between reason and passion, so that the former is powerless when the latter is in the field, rests upon the psychology which broke up the mind into separate faculties. The will did one thing, the reason another, the passions a third, the conscience or moral sense a fourth—and so on. These faculties pulled the man about, and jostled against one another and fought like Irishmen in a country fair. That theory, I need hardly say, is now quite discredited; but it is operative all the same, even in minds who think that they have cast it off.

In the next place, while it is indisputably true that we should divest ourselves of all prejudices and even (I am tempted to say) of all purposes when we read the poets, and be as passive to their influence and as willing to be swayed by them as the daffodils by the breeze of spring; this is not the same thing as going to them with empty minds.

The open mind is not the empty mind. There is no prejudice more stubborn, no condition of soul less impressionable, than ignorance. The richer the experience we bring with us when we commune either with nature or with the poets, the more we can carry away from them. It is the truly informed man who most readily, like a scientific man in his laboratory, exposes his conceptions to the unflattering test of facts, and his beliefs and hopes and fears and desires to the merciless handling of the events of life.

But I must pass on to the contrast and antagonism which is our main concern to-day. It is that which is said to exist between Art and Morality ; and on account of which we are warned not to draw moral lessons from Shakespeare—except accidentally or by the way, or only after we have laid him by and are no longer moved by his poetry. Morality and Art cannot go together, it seems, any more than Crabbed Age and Youth. They have not only different, but mutually exclusive functions and provinces and values. Morality “ be-

longs to one region," Art and Religion to another ; we cannot be sustained by the joy and peace of the latter so long as we are striving to be good. When we are judging ourselves or others, or deciding that an action is right or wrong, we are not in a fitting mood for feeling what is beautiful or ugly. To say that an action is sublime or a man's character is beautiful is merely to use metaphors : we do not really mean what we say. What is moral cannot be beautiful, nor what is immoral ugly. In short, at the very best, the sway of Art or Religion over the soul of man can only alternate with that of the Moral Law. So far as the poets are concerned, their moral value is so subordinate to their artistic worth, so secondary and so irrelevant, that the one lesson which Shakespeare teaches us is that we should draw no lessons from him : certainly no moral lesson.

May I say here that I cannot find this doctrine in Shakespeare ; and that I should be sorry if it were true ? The quarrel of the literary critics with the moralists is altogether their own. The great poets have

no share at all in it : least of all has Shakespeare. He does not propound any theory of the relation of Art to Morality, and I believe you cannot infer any from his practice. These antagonistic destructions and limitations are out of harmony with his spirit and his work. It is the literary critic who speaks of "the creeping moralist," and would fain prohibit him from reading Shakespeare. Shakespeare himself has no such antipathies. His art is not bigoted or neurotic, any more than his morality is harsh and intolerant. It is even possible that both his art and his moral teaching are at their best when they are most deeply intertwined. And am I wrong in thinking that his readers are at no time so aware of their nakedness before the searching light of the Moral Law, or so awed by its majestic grandeur, as when they most feel the power of his poetry ?

There is a school of philosophers, or there was, who called themselves Pragmatists. All that is positive in their doctrine, all that is not the criticism of their neighbours, is summed up in the good old saw that "the

proof of the pudding is in the eating." Supposing we imagine the doctrines of the literary critic put to a practical test. Let us assume that we ought not to draw lessons from Shakespeare—moral lessons above all. Now, what of the other poets ? Of Wordsworth or Tennyson, of Byron or Browning, of Milton or Dante, of Homer or the Tragic poets of Greece, of Isaiah and Job, and the poets of Israel ? Are these also not to teach ? May we not learn from them of right and wrong, and what significance and sublimity these may have ? Have the prayers you read in church no beauty, or the music you hear no moral power ? Is there no poetry in the dialogues of Plato, or in the parables of Jesus of Nazareth ? And is the Sermon on the Mount flat prose ?

There are men in these days to whom moral issues mean much. In their eyes there is nought in the world so fair as the light on the face of Duty ; and the Moral Law within is more sublime than the starry heavens above. Whither shall these men turn, in order to learn about these things ? Systematic theology to many of them, to

many of the best of them, is a barren heath ; systematic morals they believe to be more barren still, a thirsty desert all sand ; science is secular, and business is all too often regulated greed. They know of oases, with green grass and tall palms and wells of living water. These are the poets. But the critics have fenced them round : the poets must not teach.

Fortunately, however, the critics themselves break through the fences, are better than their creed, and do not reck their own rede. The main part of their labours, and the best when they write of Shakespeare, consists in comment upon his men and women, that is, upon their characters, their passions, affections, emotions, appetites, fears, anger, hope, sorrow, cruelty, ambition, remorse, pride, jealousy, hate, love, loyalty, gentleness, generosity—all forces of the moral world. And in observing these things they can no more fail to recognize their worth, that is, to value, judge, approve and condemn, and be attracted or repulsed in consequence, than they can look on gold and not see it yellow.

The truth is that in separating Morality and Poetry they have allowed a prejudice—an old ill-founded theory—to intrude and to misinterpret the fact. They have renewed a very ancient feud. But it is time that we had done not only with the Puritan's condemnation of Art, but also with the Artist's condemnation of the Puritan. The Universe is far wider and more generous than the thoughts of either. It makes room at once for Beauty and Ugliness, Truth and Error, Right and Wrong, and still it is not wrecked. Ugliness, Error, Evil, are at war with one another and themselves. But any antagonism that arises between Beauty, Truth and the Right, finds its cause in ourselves. It is from us that facts borrow their contradictory limitations. Events have little meaning if the light of the intelligence burns low ; and little beauty if the senses are sluggish. Life is commonplace where there is little enterprise; duty is dull where there is little moral insight. The world is not secular except to the secular spirit. Its manifold music is silent only to those who have not ears to hear. If its

beauty and truth do not flood the mind with light and air, and its order and ultimate rightness do not bring strength and healing, it is because we have not thrown open the windows of the soul.

I know of only one condition that I could wish to impose upon readers of Shakespeare. It is that they sweep away all these critical shibboleths, and come to him with the mind awake, expectant, exposed to every kind of good. Shakespeare's own receptiveness was as marvellous as his amplitude of soul ; and we can vie with him in neither of these ways. It was his to give, it is ours to receive ; but we cannot even take and learn from him without something of his generosity and universal kindness. Commerce in things of the mind (the commerce which does not stop at lining a man's pockets) can attain little volume or strength of current except between spirits which are liberal. The joy of Art is one, that of discovering the truth or of doing the right is another. Art can never do instead of Morality ; nor Morality instead of Art. Prose cannot render the message of Poetry, nor Poetry of Music ;

nor Music or Sculpture, nor Painting or Architecture. They are all alike supreme and sovereign in their own dominion ; and their dominion is all the Universe. For the Universe combines these perfections. It is like a sea prospect, magnificent from every point of view, looked at from any peak you choose. The scientific man, the philosopher, the poet, the servant of the good who would redeem the world from sorrow and wrong, can venture to shake their sails loose to the breeze, the ocean is wide enough for all their argosies.

There is in truth no animosity, nor jealousy, amongst our ideals; for each of them implies perfection, and finds itself best through union with the others, like the parts in music. It is the imperfection which spiritual facts take from us that brings them into collision. Our souls are not ample enough for the world in which we live, and our life is too brief. It is the hindered intelligence that distrusts religion ; it is the religion which threatens to become a superstition that would brow-beat reason ; it is bad Art that collides with Morality.

That soul is out of tune and has “laid waste some of its powers” which finds Morality at war with Poetry—a harsh and tuneless intruder, breaking upon its joy and freedom with its discordant jar of threats and prohibitions.

But Morality had not that character for Shakespeare any more than it had for Wordsworth. He was not Polonius. He was not meddlesome and didactic. His wisdom did not run into wise saws and modern instances, and Morality was not for him merely human custom grown stale. He found the “commandment exceeding broad,” and the moral life a daring enterprise, a limitless adventure amongst possibilities unexplored. But it was also everlastingly secure. The seeker after good was in a friendly world, as safe in his own element amongst the storms as an albatross on the wing, stable in its own equipoise.

If, as we are told, “doctrines and theories concerning the place of man in the Universe and the origin of evil are a poor and partial business compared with that dazzling vision of the pitiful state of humanity which is

revealed by Tragedy"; if Shakespeare's tragedy, like an earthquake, shook the world's frame and exposed the slightness of structure of human custom; if "the operation of chance or fate broke up man's quiet orderly habits and his prosaic speech"; still I will dare to aver that it is not by Shakespeare that Morality itself is made a mean thing, tossed aside by what is greater, or that "the world is given over once more to the forces that struggled in chaos."¹

If Shakespeare exposes "the pitiful estate of humanity," he also showed the vastness of man's endowment, and the range of his capacity to suffer, to strive, to endure, to survive, to triumph in the chance and to become his own destiny. If it were otherwise, if "a struggle in chaos" were the final note of Shakespeare's tragedy, that were an end of Art as well as of Morality. I know that in great music there are daring discords. Nevertheless, not only in the end, but throughout the movement from the first emergence of the discords, the musical ear feels and knows that they are on the

¹ See Raleigh's *Shakespeare*, p. 196 ff.

way to resolution, and are lending range and grandeur to the final harmonies. Nor is it otherwise with poetry. Stark blunder is no theme for any of the arts. And Shakespeare, being faithful to the demands of his craft, gives no

“sample
Of absolute and irretrievable black,—black's soul of
black,
Beyond white's power to disintensify.”

No one known to me has given to evil such amplitude of scope to do its worst as Shakespeare has done ; no one has given it such large allowance to muster all its forces in the field—cruelty, hate, ingratitude, lust, treachery ; feebleness, foolishness, meanness, and all the agony and ruin in their train. Nevertheless, even though he did not “ pause for death,” and the echoes of human wrongs travel beyond life's earthly bourne, still there is no doubt about the stability of the moral world ; there is no doubt that evil stands in a redeeming context. If *this* insubstantial pageant fades, and the revel ends, if man breaks his staff and drowns his book, it is because he is leaving the magic

isle for the mainland. Shakespeare had little that was sure to say of immortality ; but it was the presupposition of his art, as it is the condition of all sane life and thought, that chaos is not the last word. He knew and made us "see and feel and understand" that far beyond the range of earthly chance and seeming chaos there ran, like a rich seam through the nature of things, that righteous Law, the Godhead's most benignant grace, through which "the most ancient heavens are fresh and strong."

In insisting on the ethical significance of Shakespeare's plays I do not mean at all that Shakespeare's world is run like a dame's school, with its dark corner for culprits and its candy for good conduct. "An assignment of amounts of happiness and misery, an assignment even of life and death, in proportion to merit, we do not find. No one who thinks of Desdemona and Cordelia ; or who remembers that one end awaits Richard III and Brutus, Macbeth and Hamlet ; or who asks himself who suffered most, Othello or Iago, will ever accuse Shakespeare of representing the ultimate

power as 'poetically' just."¹ That were too crude ; and the contradiction of such so-called "poetic justice" with the facts of life is too obvious. It would, I believe, be not less incompatible with the demands of tragic poetry. In fact, such justice would be not poetic, but *unpoetic*.

Now, how comes it that this tame and stale scheme of things, which is recognized as fatal to tragic poetry, is thought to be essential to morality ? On what grounds is it maintained that in the world of tragic poetry "Morality is tossed aside as a petty and peddling and merely human affair" ? Shakespeare's tragedies, we are told, "deal with greater things than man ; with powers and passions, elemental forces and dark abysses of suffering ; with the central fire that breaks through the crust of civilization, and makes a splendour in the sky above the blackness of ruined homes."²

This is not rhetoric, it is a far rarer thing : it is oratory. But let us keep our feet. Let us remind ourselves that, after all,

¹ Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 32.

² Raleigh, p. 197.

these powers and passions are the powers and passions of man's soul. The soul's expanse is vast enough to entertain them, and the dark abysses of suffering are all within the human heart.

Moreover, these forces are elemental *because* they are moral, and the world itself is moral, because the spirit of man lends it that splendour. Leave the moral meaning out of the last scene in which Lady Macbeth appears ; there remains nothing but a noble lady, walking in her sleep and rubbing her hands. "It is an accustomed action with her." But what is it that makes the Doctor of Physic whisper at the sight in awe, "God, God forgive us all." He has heard her cry as she strove to wash her hands : "Here's the smell of blood still ; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh ! oh ! oh !" It was the cry of a soul tortured by its sense of guilt, awakened to the judgment of the eternal world of right and wrong. Poetry at the height of its sublimity, and Morality in the full might of its majesty are, surely, here together and at one.

But, it is urged, the moral laws are not represented by Shakespeare as being upheld. The death of Cordelia stands, so far as the range of our earthly vision can extend, quite unredeemed ; there are crimes which are in no sense expiated (except possibly in the sufferings of the innocent !), and some of Shakespeare's heroes " suffer for their very virtues." Nothing approaching a strict balance is kept between the actions of men and their fortune. Justice is asleep. Its laws are broken, and no one pays heed. And in all these things Shakespeare's tragedies are the more true to human life.

What answer can be made ? First of all, I should like to admit that the cry is as old as humanity, and its pathos as deep. The truth of it is far more to be respected than the shallow teaching of the friends of Job ; and it is altogether to be pardoned to men and women, when " the whips and scorns of time " are more than they can bear.

But all the same, this cry is not heard except when the stars of heaven are hidden and man has lost his way. And it is not easy

to respect its use as a theory in the petty quarrels of literary criticism. The reasoning is too shallow, the grounds of the charge against the Universe are too weak. For the charge rests on the assumption that if the moral world is to stand, there must be a better distribution of cakes and ale. Otherwise, "good conduct is of no avail."

But, surely, we are not on the level of morality when we reason in this fashion. The moral insight is not higher than that of a tinker's mule, which will do nothing but for strokes and fodder—except kick! We reason like children, in the nursery, in the paradise of sense, asking what they shall get for being good. What else is the use of good conduct? "We have washed ourselves with snow-water, and made our hands never so clean,"¹ and yet there is no reward.

Once, however, the sleep of sense is disturbed and the dawn of the day of spirit breaks, then right and wrong are seen, *in themselves*, so to outweigh all other things that nothing counts except the choice

¹ Job ix. 30.

between them. All issues else are finite, and secondary. There is not scope enough for tragedy in the region of merely natural good and ill. Such is the power of the alchemy that lies in personal character that it transmutes these things at its will. We have known of those "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft,"¹ who turn all these things into the splendour of moral triumph.

Natural good and ill are but "stuff for transmuting," mere raw material, waiting for its worth upon its use.

But once moral good and evil are recognized, they are known to have their character in themselves; and the writing is indelible. The tragedy is the doing of the evil deed, the joy is on the battle-field, and the triumph is the very encounter with what is base. Let the outer consequences be what they may, the good man will not alter his reckoning, nor deem that there are any greater forces whose inrush sweeps the moral world away.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 23.

To demand that natural advantages shall follow as consequences upon moral antecedents, according to the simple law of cause and effect, implies a rudimentary scheme of things, and very bad logic. No doubt the Universe, natural and moral, is one, and there is no deed that is done by man whose echoes do not in the last resort reverberate to its utmost bounds. But in spite of the unity of the Universe, we do not expect to grow grapes by sowing thistles—although both the grapes and the thistles belong to the botanist's kingdom. Our critics, however, cry that "good conduct is of no avail," and morality does not count, because moral causes do not run straightway into natural effects. But there are rational relations and principles of order other than those of such simple causality ; and absence of causal sequence between natural good or evil and moral good or evil is no proof of a disordered universe.

Let them advance an instance of the failure of Moral Law within its own domain, or of Natural Law in the natural world, if they desire to prove that "chaos has come

again." One instance would suffice: one sample of a man becoming a worse man by doing a good action, or of a man becoming a better man by friendly commerce with evil; one ill thought that does not taint the soul with moral evil, or one struggle against the power of evil, that brings the soul no new strength and moral splendour. That would, indeed, wreck the moral world. But I have never known of such an instance; and it is not true that men are ruined by their virtues, even although the ruin brought by moral evil is greatest in the noble soul.

Nowhere in the plays of Shakespeare is there any foothold for such views as these. What we find in him is the opposite. Not that he wrote either to establish or to illustrate the stability of the Moral Universe. He never wrote with a view to any abstract theme. He justifies neither Morality nor Art—*except as he goes*. But he looked at the world of men and women, saw their doings and their destiny, heard their cries and their laughter, laid bare their souls and found the moral powers there at play—even as the poets of Greece, when all the

world was young, came upon the gods and goddesses.

I agree with all my heart that “to read a philosophy into Shakespeare or to invent some obsession in him and hunt for traces of it throughout his work is not only idle but hurtful.”¹ But I venture to add that there is an opposite error not less fatal. It is that of not following him whithersoever he leads, possessed from time to time with what possesses him, our hearts beating throb for throb with his own.

For, let the critics say what they will, he *was* possessed at times. There were certain matters which made his pulse beat high. It is true that his gaze was universal and kindly like the sun’s. He was the most broad, tolerant, patient, and slow to judge of all the sons of men; a looker-on at life, “allowing, with equal mind, the proudly riding and the foundering bark.” But his universality and impartiality were not such as to reduce all things to the same dead level. These are the marks of dullness. It is when the light is low that all the world

¹ Mackail, p. 6.

is grey ; when the sun comes forth the colours come out, and there are heights and depths and degrees of glory. Nature has her preferences after all, and her everlasting bias ; and so has Mind. And Shakespeare, because he was close to Nature, shared it far beyond all other men. His genius, his poetic passion, like the flames of a great fire, flashed and flared with the changing winds, and rose and fell with the material on which it fed.

Shakespeare's mind has been compared to a sensitive plate : "not a word, not a humour, not a quality, but he immediately took its impress. On that amazing plate were recorded every lineament of body and mind, 'all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there.' In that even more amazing developing-room the records were put together, and were reeled out so as to give the vibrating effect of life. Yet of a life swifter, tenser, more vivid than our actual experience." ¹

This is well said and true ; I agree and yet I dissent. The receptive passivity of Shakespeare's spirit was at the same time

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the most intense activity ; its seeming rest the rest of the perfect motion of the equilibrated system of the stars. That activity, moreover, was selective at every instant, alert to the endlessly varying values of things : and it fixed that value in terms of spirit, that is to say, in the coinage of Truth and Good and Beauty.

We have all been warned against the danger of reading Shakespeare's character from his plays. There is only one way of averting it, and that is by finding him everywhere. For, after all, everything that was said or done in them had in its degree occupied his thoughts and coursed through his arteries. If we do this we shall not identify him with any one of his personages ; not with Hamlet, nor Othello, nor Henry V, nor Brutus, nor any other. But we shall recognize, all the same, that he was more like these than he was like Iago or Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch or Bardolph, Macbeth or Justice Shallow.

If we ask why this is so, there can be, I believe, only one answer. Shakespeare had his bias and his preferences. His mind

had a region in which it homed : there he preened his wings for his far-off flights, and thither he ever returned. And that region was the mind of man. His first and last, his despotic, nay, his overwhelming interest, was in human character.

In saying this I am not forgetting his pure delight in things purely natural : how the dawns break, once and again, on his canvas, “and the worshipp'd sun peer'd forth the golden window of the east”¹; nor how, like Proserpina, he lets “the flowers fall”—the rosemary and rue, and

“daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.”²

But fairer even than the flowers she hands round her guests is Perdita herself, “the prettiest low-born lass that ever ran on the green-sward”; her hand “as soft as dove's down, and as white as it, or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow that's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er.”³ Never

¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, I, 1.

² *Winter's Tale*, IV, 3.

³ *Ibid.*

was there such a rendering of either man or woman as Shakespeare's. There, amongst the infinite complexities and the rifts and discords and intoxicating loveliness and lawlessness of personality, his insight and apprehension, his power to interpret in terms of his magic art, was at its highest.

But what is personality, or rather what is character? It is the region of taste, of attractions and repulsions, of preferences and rejections wise and foolish of every kind of good and ill. Character is the whole man: it is as wide as life, the theatre of both comedy and tragedy, the region of both laughter and tears. And there is no part or element in it which does not both borrow from and lend to the whole, which means, if we did not misuse the word, that there is no part or element which has not "moral" significance, no deed but leaves its doer either a worse or a better man, a more or a less delectable companion in the way of life. It is because everything partakes in and contributes to the whole character—the glint of the eye, the touch of the hand, the tone of voice, the fitting phrase—that

a kind of perfection sits on all the deeds of some men. We call them "real gentlemen."

So it is, for instance, and very clearly, with Shakespeare's heroines. Rosalind is something of a tom-boy, there is a touch of "the doublet and hose in her disposition"; Portia is something of a manager—the grey mare which is the better horse as compared with Bassanio; Perdita and Imogen and Miranda "outstrip all praise and make it halt behind them,"¹ by a charm that is not describable. They are all perfect in their own way, and Cordelia radiates a larger and a sterner splendour. By some trick of his magic Shakespeare makes whatever kind of perfection they possess appear in all they do, in every movement of body and soul. Ethics, morals, mean this whole way of life; and it were well if we could restore to these terms the rich significance of which they are being gradually robbed. We have none others to serve instead of them. I would fain refute the notion that the moral world is limited—a narrow and inhospitable region, full of "hazards and hardships," crossed

¹ *Tempest*, IV, 1.

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and intercrossed with barbed-wire prohibitions and trodden into mire by a ceaseless succession of futile defeats and empty victories. It is an error to believe that we are not amongst moral issues, nor in the moral world, unless we are censorious and legal-minded, judging and being judged, doing things by set and rigid rule, and always in the mood of prigs talking about duties. Shakespeare's men and women lived in no such world, and had not such meticulous and prudential ways.

I must deny myself on this occasion the risky pleasure of trying to show in detail what most attracted and what most repelled Shakespeare—or, if you prefer, what virtues and what vices are most in evidence in his plays. I shall only say that all the virtues—courage, loyalty, frankness, tolerance, sincerity—have some kin to kindness, some touch of gentleness; and that the vices are hard and heartless, those most in the mood of hell are akin to treachery, ingratitude, and especially cruelty.

Above all, we feel that the virtues of his men and women were native growths of

the soil, and had breathed the air and taken in the sunshine of Shakespeare's own England. And we think of Shakespeare's England as young and very happy. Shakespeare's England sang at its work. Its moral and religious gyves had been taken away. It has been liberated from asceticism. The path of duty was not stained with the bleeding feet of many pilgrims ; it ran over the green-sward ; for "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." There was adventure abroad. The spirit of the Renaissance was stirring, and everything in the world, if not misused by man, was as fresh as the spring of the year.

Hence I find the well-doing of Shakespeare's characters extraordinarily spontaneous and joyous, like the swing of the waves of a sunlit ocean. The virtues flourished as naturally and unobtrusively as the green of the pasturing meadows. There seemed to be no call for grim resolve, and no strain. Imogen and Perdita had no need to say, and never said, "Go to ! Let us now be charming," any more than the violets and the roses say, "Come ! Let us obey the

laws of loveliness." But they do obey, all the same. If the botanist or poet goes and looks, he will see the laws in operation. They are the laws of life. They are life itself.

Look where we will in Shakespeare, we find that the world of man's character, the moral world, has this complete naturalness. The vices grew like weeds amongst the tended flowers, and both vices and virtues are always native to the soil. The growth, too, is apt to be abundant, like Falstaff's humour—hogsheads of it—or Hamlet's over-weighted thoughts; rapid, like Macbeth's stormy ambition, or Othello's torturing jealousy; unpremeditated, as Imogen's pretty courage, imperious as Juliet's love. "Hazards and hardships" and hesitations in morality, balancing between right and wrong, are incidents of man's stumbling childhood—the prudential stage—in the ways of good and evil. Shakespeare's men and women are further on the road when they appear in the plays. If they have gone out into the world, their world has passed into them; and, in either case, they and their world are one. They are *its* destiny. *It*

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takes its character from *them*. *They* fill it with light or darkness. Lady Macbeth's sin incarnadines the seas ; the tempest in Lear's mind overpowers the storm on the open heath. The moral powers, as we listen to Hamlet's soliloquizing, are elemental, universal, a part, nay, the essence and the substance of the world.

If we read Shakespeare wisely, I do not know how we can avoid leaving behind us some of our too familiar dualisms and recognize better than we do how outer and inner, nature and spirit blend and make one glory. What impotent futilities both nature and spirit would be were they held apart ! Man borrows all his excellencies from the world, and the world from man ; divorced, they are poor indeed. "Character is made by the events of life," we are told. Events have no character, I would reply, till men and women give it to them. The weird sisters were empty apparitions to Banquo ; he is startled for a moment and then passes on, remarking that

"The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them."

For Macbeth, at his side, they were
fiends juggling with his whole after-destiny.
Through them he supp'd full of horrors;
direness was familiar to his slaughterous
thoughts, and life

"a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

The world is common when man is
ordinary; flat and stale where he has little
enterprise; and it catches dullness from
his music. But bring the poet on the
scene, and give him the right to trade, and
earth and sky are strewn with beauty. He
looks, and

"The floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold."

He listens:

"There's not the smallest orb . . .
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins."

But when Shakespeare breaks into full
magnificence it is "the harmony" which
"is in immortal soul" that we hear. When
the music attains a grandeur which awes

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and overwhelms, then his theme is almost always the strife of the moral powers in the human soul, and the chaos wrought by evil. And there is no incident which in Shakespeare's hands may not borrow greatness from this fact. Any small event becomes an opportunity for some deed weighted with moral destiny, and is charged with moral import. There is nothing so safely ordinary and commonplace that Shakespeare's genius may not strike a spark from it and begin a conflagration.

Neither for Shakespeare, nor for facts as they are, is the natural world here and the moral world there ; time and the things which belong to time and seem to limit life here, and the things which matter and mean and last somewhere beyond. It is here, and hardly anywhere else, that I cannot follow Mr. Bradley ; for he says that Art and Religion belong to one region and Morality to another. Morality is not a forbidding tract through which man must travel first, and leave behind when he attains the peace of Religion. Morality and Religion are aspects of life, not alternate conditions. Morality is Religion in

process : it is the principle of the highest and the best in operation. Religion is related to Morality, as the theme or *motif* of a musical masterpiece is to the movements through which it passes—often wild notes of woe and discord—which evolve its meaning and set its beauty free.

The plays of Shakespeare are amongst the sacred books of mankind just because he lifts off the limitations which make the world ordinary and flat. He makes the good at work in the world at once so natural and so joyous, and finds it in such unexpected places ; and sin the source of such far-travelling disorder and misery. The ethical meaning of man's life was, to him, as stupendous and as inevitable as its beauty. And they were both ubiquitous.

He rises on his wing into this wider world at any instant, and from any trivial occasion.

Friar Lawrence fills his osier-cage with plants, as

“The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path.”

Let us listen to his reflexions. They are

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of good and evil, and how they mingle and contend, changing each into its opposite in the lives of men.

“ Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime’s by action dignified.

- Within the infant rind of this weak flower
Poison hath residence and med’cine power.
. . . Two such opposed Kings encamp them still
In man as well as herbs—grace and rude will ;
And where the worse is dominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.”¹

But such moral reflexions you will say are natural to a friar. Let us then look into Henry IV’s chamber, as he retires for the night and reflects upon his own state and that of the many thousands of his poorest subjects.

“ O Sleep, O gentle Sleep,
Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
And steep my senses in forgetfulness.”²

Or listen to Richard II :

“ I have been studying } how to compare
This prison where I live unto the world.

¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, II, 3.

² *King Henry IV*, III, 1.

But whate'er I am,
Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
With being nothing. Music do I hear?
Ha, ha! keep time: how sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.¹

Or let us listen to hear, in the storm on the
heath, finding in the same theme another
contrast:

"Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just."²

Or let us look into the Court of Law,
where morality is most of all a matter of
law and rule.

"Do you confess this bond?" asks Portia of
Antonio.

"I do."

"Then must the Jew be merciful."

"On what compulsion must I?" leaps out Shylock's
ringing challenge. "Tell me that."

¹ *Richard II*, V, 5.

² *King Lear*, III, 3.

The answer of Portia always sounds to me like the song of an archangel winging his flight through the heights of heaven :

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath ; it is twice blest :
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes :
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest : it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown :
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings ;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway :
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God himself :
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice."¹

And we are not to learn moral lessons from Shakespeare, except accidentally ! I ask what manner of man is he who can read him and escape such accidents ?

But I must conclude ; and in doing so, I shall even dare to draw a moral and a lesson for our time.

I believe there is no degree or kind of good which, in these days, we ordinary citizens would not secure if we could

¹ *Merchant of Venice*, IV, 1.

for our country—even at some pains and sacrifice.

I know of no good so great, and none whose pursuit is so urgent, as that the neglect of which is even now leading the greatest in military strength, the proudest of all the nations of the earth—manacled to its doom. There is no doubt of its fate. There is no doubt as to its cause. Moral good and evil had lost their weight. Moral issues were secondary, things that might be tossed aside and forgotten. The Moral Law had lost its sovereign rights, and become a mere attendant upon an earthly and quite vulgar ambition.

'This country of ours,

" This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,"¹

is in naught that I can name more happy or more precious than in her will to stand amongst the nations a defender of the right. Rarely, if at any time, do the poets so "stand in state and gather their greatness

¹ *King Richard II*, II, 1.

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round them," as when they set the world of right and wrong to music.

" Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us
rue
If England to itself do rest but true."¹

We look forward to a world at peace. We here at home will pursue with new ardour and security the truths of natural science and build even on still larger lines our commercial and industrial might. What more ? Shall we rest content with a material good ? Or shall this people, more than at any other time, having learned the rule of national greatness, and having proved the sustaining power of dedication to a noble cause, shall we be a people to whom moral issues mean much, and who find the light on the face of Duty the fairest of all things on earth ? To whom are we looking ?

¹ *King John*, V, 7.

*The Library as a Maker of Character*¹

PLATO, in one of his dialogues, tells us how Socrates, having discovered that Phædrus had a book under his arm, ventured with him outside the gates of Athens. "I am a lover of knowledge," said the ancient sage, "and the men who dwell in the city are my teachers, and not the trees of the country; though, indeed, I do believe that you have found a spell with which to draw me out of the city into the country, like a hungry cow before whom a bough or bunch of fruit is waved. For only hold up before me a book, and you may lead me all round Attica, and over the wide world."

I am afraid that few of us can rival this ancient philosopher in his love either of

¹ An address given to the Annual Meeting of Subscribers to Stirling's and Glasgow Public Library, April, 1905.

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men or of books. But it is a legitimate inference that subscribers to this library have some love of both, and I should like to be permitted to congratulate those of you who, from year to year, maintain this institution and devote wise care to its right management. Your task is not easy in these days, when, to quote a modern sage, "there is a number, a frightfully increasing number, of books that are decidedly, to the readers of them, not useful," as well as a "certain number of books written by a supremely noble kind of people, not a very great number of books, but still a number fit to occupy all your reading industry. In short, I conceive that books are like men's souls—divided into sheep and goats. Some few are going up and carrying us up, heavenward; calculated, I mean, to be of priceless advantage in teaching—in forwarding the teaching of all generations. Others, a frightful number, are going down, down, doing ever the more, and the wider, and the wilder mischief. Keep a strict eye on that latter class of books, my young friends."

That passage occurs in Carlyle's Rectorial

Address to the students of Edinburgh. I think it probable that Carlyle would tender the same advice to the custodians of our public libraries in laying great stress upon their function of selecting amongst books, and of selecting by reference to the moral character of the readers. "It is," he says, "becoming a very important consideration in our day. And we have to cast aside altogether the idea people have, that if they are reading any book, that if an ignorant man is reading any book, he is doing rather better than nothing at all. I must entirely call that in question; I even venture to deny that. It would be much safer and better for many a reader, that he had no concern with books at all."

The love of Carlyle for his fellows is perhaps a little too apt to put on a stern look, and whether amongst men or books he is prone to make the class of "goats" a large one. It is possible, too, that he did not sufficiently bear in mind that books, though they may be weak and poor, have a way of educating the reader above themselves. Great books do not attract little minds or young ones.

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Men advance in the matters of taste and morals, as in others, very slowly, and have to begin far down ; and we can as little enjoy the best literature first as we can begin in mathematics with the Differential Calculus. I have a great belief in reading any books, provided they are not positively vicious ; and I count great catholicity of spirit amongst the qualities which those men should have who buy books for the uses of the public.

Still, Carlyle is substantially right in what he says. And, at the time when his ideal is being realized—the ideal of founding for every city and village its own library—often by means of a public rate, it behoves the public authorities to see that they have men of taste and real worth of character upon the committees. I do not mean, let me say decisively, that such men should exclude books that have no other function but to amuse. On the contrary, now that the working classes, whatever may be said of the other classes, have shorter hours of labour and more leisure than ever before in the history of the world, the problem of the right use of that leisure has become

very real, and the provision of means of innocent pleasure for them is a most important social duty. There is more power of real reform in one new invention that brings harmless joy, than in much repression and prohibition. It is the empty life that is difficult to lead in the right path, and there is safety, as well as joy, in multiplicity of interests. Sir Walter Scott was for Carlyle, you will remember, only the supreme confectioner of his age, profitable neither for instruction nor reproof, for admonition nor building up: a singularly false moral as well as literary judgment of a man who never wrote a line that should raise a blush on the most modest face, but whose books have the unconscious and unsought power of bringing health and strength to the soul.

Man's character is a many-sided thing, and man himself has the power of going right as well as of going wrong, in many ways. He has many needs, and much hunger for many things, if the powers of his soul have been really awakened. And those who cater for him must remember this and surround him with good influences of

many kinds. It is at last the recognized duty of the State and the municipality to secure for the citizens surroundings that are healthy for their bodies. It is only an extension of the same principle to recognize that the same responsibility lies upon them as to the mind and character of the citizens. It is not necessary to be a Socialist to admit this, nor to become an undiscriminating advocate of State action, nor an undistinguishing believer in its powers. The State cannot make men good. There is a sense in which it cannot touch human character at all, for that is always of the man's own making. But it can provide the means of virtue for its citizens and remove obstacles to their right-doing. And undoubtedly it can provide for its own strength and stability in no better way. For Plato and Aristotle, the greatest minds that ever gave themselves to "empire building," as we say nowadays, the one task that was to occupy the statesman, the one business of the State to which all else was held in due subordination, was to educate its citizens, and one of the means of doing so Plato expresses as follows :—

"Let our artists," he says, and he is speaking of the poets amongst others, "be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful, then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in every thing; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason."

It is a noble ideal, and as true a definition of the statesman's duty as was ever given. Well! that duty you, in your own sphere, are called upon to perform who manage this institution. It is a very unobtrusive sphere. The forces that dwell in books are very silent; there is in this region none of the fury and passion of political strife. But silent forces are not seldom the greatest of all. The life that upsprings anew each year, clothing the earth with beauty and filling its generous lap with sustenance for man and beast, comes not with the rending earthquake, or the riving thunder, but with

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the silent wheeling of the earth to greet the sun. And such a power of turning the soul towards the sun there lies in books. Not even Milton's eloquent pen could express all the virtue that lies in them. You will discover it only by endeavouring to imagine what mankind would be without them.

I do not despise the value of the living voice of a living teacher, and the direct communion of soul with soul. The true university can never be a collection of books, even although you can get the teacher's doctrine in a book, and can then read it, and read it again and again. But if the teacher's learning perished with him like the eloquence of a statesman or the voice of a prima donna ; if man had not invented those little signs which so strangely suggest his thoughts and make them live from age to age, it is questionable if human civilization could proceed far beyond its first beginnings. We should be without the wisdom of the Greek, the stable strength of the Roman, the inspired enthusiasm towards God of the Hebrew ; we should be naked in soul and

very poor, robbed of our vision of the past, and our vista into the future, our life narrowed down to what is "here" and "now." But our institutions, and amongst these none are more important than books, give continuity to human history. Books are they which knit the ages together, making of their many coloured parts one wondrous whole, and surrounding the life of the moving present with the aggregated treasures of an ever-lengthening past. So that human experience is like a river, ever growing deeper and broader, and more mighty as the little rills of individual life flow into it on every hand, until now it is able to sustain, laden with the enterprises impossible for a younger world, argosies richly laden with the purposes of the nations.

This power of accumulating experience, of working the past into the very substance and life of the present is, to me, the most marvellous of all the powers of man, and marks him off most distinctly from his humbler ancestors. It means almost everything for the individual. It separates the foolish from the wise, who both begin with

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the veriest rudiments. But it means even more when we look at it on the great scale of the race. It means the surrounding of the later generations of men in civilized countries with an environment of rational ways and means of life, the magnitude of whose influence is simply immeasurable. Occasionally we are startled, as we were recently by Japan, when we see a nation in a few years leap up from nothingness and take its place abreast with the foremost of the earth. That, I think, is due to their new environment. The experience of many centuries slowly garnered, the laboured results of millions of good lives spent in the service of humble causes, turns like fallen leaves into black soil for the forest trees to grow upon. This has been our history. This experience, this history—the thoughts of the wise, the inventions of the ingenious, the purposes of the good, we, and the other nations of Western Europe, have handed over ready-made to Japan. And at the call of such an environment, the powers that ever lie sleeping in the human mind ready to be awakened by the solici-

tations of circumstance, leapt there into sudden evidence and surprised the world.

It is not in books alone, of course, that this environment is embodied ; there are institutions also of many kinds which are really nothing but embodied ideas. But the finer essence, even of these, is to be found in books, and their meaning, which is their very soul, is there made plain and capable of repossession. We do well in ranking them amongst the greatest powers of the world, and the most potent of all factors of human character, except, perhaps, the inborn faculty they awake into life, and sustain in its growth. Undoubtedly ideas rule the world, and the makers of good books are its true kings. But this is not a theme I need dwell upon in this company, which knows full well how the shackles have been struck off the hands of commerce by Adam Smith ; of political life by Rousseau ; of religion by Kant—but why should I mention names in the endless roll of the company of these saints, these knights of the spirit of truth ? They have sought little reward, as the rewards of men go, and they

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got little. The company of the world's authors in poverty of outward appearance can be compared to nothing except to Falstaff's ragged regiment, only their souls were noble. Even the institutions in which some, at least, of these people live and work, who occasionally kindle better thoughts in others than they can boast of themselves, are, relative to the work they do, the poorest in the world and the worst equipped. In these times it is not often that one is privileged to plead for them, except as a means of making more wealth by new inventions that will enable this nation of ours to maintain its own amongst competitors. In Scotland even, once famous for the place it gave to arts and the philosophies, and the sustenance it gave to what we now call "useless learning," this is pretty much the case.

But in this company to-day, I believe I stand amongst lovers of books—books whose end is to give pleasure to the passing hour, and often nothing more; books, too, which give us the inspiring example of noble lives, which tell us something of the glory

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of the world and of the mind of man, which kindle aspiration and inspire the deeds that change the face of human history. Will you accept my thanks for this opportunity of saying a little on behalf of so good a cause ? And see well that what in you lies you will do, for the sake not merely of mechanical inventions, or industrial power and gain, but for the sake of the human character that books help to make, and in which lies, after all is said, the secret of a nation's happiness and true prosperity.

*The Education of the Citizen*¹

NO definition either of education or of the citizen is offered. Definitions are dangerous tools to handle. They are never entirely or permanently true of the facts of mind or of the world of spirit, for these have no fixed boundaries: they do not shut out one another, and none of them is static or can bear being "fastened down." You cannot say where beauty begins or truth and goodness end. The domains of art and morality, of knowledge and religion, overlap. They imply and serve and even may pass into one another. The virtues of the home—if they be not nipped and blackened by a frost—become the excellencies of the citizen as naturally as the bud opens into the full-blown flower; and the virtues of the citizen pass into—nay, derive all their true value from the fact that in serving

¹ Reprinted from *The Round Table*, June, 1917.

his country he is serving a cause wider even than humanity and more permanent than time.

On this account the sciences of human life, as compared with the natural sciences, suffer from a grave inconvenience. The latter can isolate one aspect of a fact and make it the sole object of their inquiry. And natural facts can sustain this kind of treatment, for their unity and singleness are not intense. They are not mutilated by the separation of their elements, and the elements themselves retain in their isolation some reality and valid significance. But it is not so with the sciences of man. They not only distort the truth when they endeavour to confine themselves to single aspects, but destroy their object. The living and, above all, the life which is not only physical but sensitive and self-conscious or rational, and therefore capable of a rightness and wrongness which have no finite limits, has no separable aspects. Every phase implies and holds by the whole, both borrows and dispenses meaning, and is saturated with relations. Even the difference of natural and spiritual, though

by no means surface deep, is not a severance. Economic theory, in the degree in which it is divorced from ethics, stands out as the most dangerous falsehood of our times. Ethical theory, on the other hand, in the degree in which it forgets the natural setting of the moral life, loses all its truth as a doctrine and all its practical use for conduct. Ethics must have regard to the nature of man; and if a cross section could be taken at any moment of man's spirit, it would be seen to be a sample of the *wholeness* which is infinitude, and an emblem of eternity in which time is at once produced and overcome.

The sciences of man are branches of the tree of *philosophy*, and they will not grow as "cuttings." According to Plotinus, the choir of souls, standing around the choragus, sing out of tune so long as they turn away from him, but "when they turn to him they sing in perfect harmony, deriving their inspiration from him." And the Muses, when they dance, hold one another by the hand.

It follows that to educate man we ought

at all times to respect this principle of unity and wholeness. But as a matter of fact it is consistently overlooked and violated. If we speak of a man as "citizen" we think of him in some simple relation, not as standing amidst the complex totality of his spiritual obligations and opportunities, but as having duties and privileges which are special and particular, and therefore relevant and obligatory only on certain occasions, as when he is casting his vote or sitting on a jury or engaged upon some social or charitable work. As a family, or business, or religious man, and in times of peace, his citizenship is not in his thoughts, and he demands nothing of the State except that it shall be somehow in the background, lest the need of it should arise.

When we speak of "education" our horizon is limited in a similar way, and we think of a mere fragment of life. Our imagination as a rule does not travel beyond the primary and secondary school, or at most, and in the case of a very small minority, the university. Education is, in fact, supposed to be a preliminary and introductory matter.

When “real life” begins, education, whether it has been good or bad, is normally assumed to have come to an end. Experience grows and character matures, but even those who continue to be “in earnest about their souls” do not usually regard “the improvement of the mind” as a part of the process of saving them.

I. BRITISH AND GERMAN CONCEPTIONS OF THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

These limited notions of the meaning of citizenship and education are rendered still less effective by the fact that the British people, unlike the German, has not seriously endeavoured to define the purpose which should guide the process of educating the nation. The difference is striking and instructive. Germany knows definitely what it wants from education, and what manner of product its schools and universities are intended to turn out. “The ultimate aims of a national system of education should be to train men and women *for the advancement of the State.*” “Technical training is indispensable in the economic, and for the girls

in the social, *interest of the State.*" "Technical and craft training alone are not thought enough to secure the general welfare; they may promote merely the egoistic side of man, but the outlook of the individual should be widened to include an understanding of other trades and other nations, and an appreciation of his *duties to the community and the State.*"¹

No purpose could be more definite, and none could be more consistently pursued or systematically sustained: it is education *by* the State *for the sake of* the State. And the results have been stupendous. They cannot be reckoned in terms of the industrial or commercial prosperity of the German people, great as these have been, nor even in the indescribable military might of the German armies. These are, in the last resort, only external manifestations of a deeper force within, partial expressions of a far more significant fact. What Germany has revealed to the world, in a light and on a scale never known before, is the power that lies in

¹ Board of Education Pamphlet 18, *Compulsory Continuation Schools in Germany*, p. 23.

national education when persistently and strenuously used. Autocratic rulers by means of this instrument have shaped a nation's mind to their own purposes, and thereby determined beforehand what a whole people shall desire and will and do. Its aspirations and activities, its passions and opinions, its loves, its hates, its character, have been as soft wax in their hands. *Germany's education is Germany's fate.*

Impressed by these facts, seen as they are in the red light of war, the British people has begun to reflect, and there are sure signs that it desires to take its own educational agencies in hand in a more earnest and purposeful manner than it has ever done before. Nations at war observe one another's ways very closely. When the war is over it is found that the combatants have been borrowing from, and lending to, each other ; and it frequently happens that the victorious nation borrows most, and least wisely. It is not impossible that Germany may learn from us something of that willingness to let *others* "have a place in the sun," which

has made our Empire strong because it is free and loyal; while we, desiring to adopt the educational method which has made Germany strong in the economic sense, may catch the contagion of her materialism. One thing is certain—namely, the greatness of the responsibility of determining the educational ways of a nation. It is to interfere vitally with its soul.

It is not certain that we are about to rise to the level of the issue. We may perhaps allow our educational methods to be hustled along at the mercy of shallow conceptions of national well-being. There is no conclusive evidence of any profound belief in education on our part as a people. Its uses are not usually computed in terms of *character*—that is, of an efficient and happy manhood. The saving power of a deep intellectual passion is not recognized. The man in the street, who is supposed to have a monopoly of that most precious of gifts—namely, common sense—is hardly ready to endorse the conviction of R. L. Stevenson, that “to be wholly devoted to some intellectual exercise is to have succeeded in life.”

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By "success" we mean something different. And the bearing of the culture and use of the intellect upon the emotions, the will and conduct, is not admitted except with grave doubts. "Intellectualist" is not a term of respect: any more than is the word "academic" or "theorist." And who trusts the judgment of a "professor" or "philosopher"?

It is true that there has been advance. "A hundred years ago it was commonly said that the mass of the people did not need any education at all. Fifty years ago it was sufficient to teach the children of the workers to the age of ten. Twenty years ago we were told that it was enough if they stayed at school till twelve or thirteen." And now continuation schools are to be instituted and made compulsory; we are promising to pay the school-teacher a better salary, and possibly to educate him better, and even to treat him as a member of a "liberal profession"; and, above all, we are resolved to set up and equip and make a large use of institutions for scientific and technical training—possibly without sacri-

ficing the humanities. But these new-found educational virtues, limited as they are, are not quite safe as yet : they are at the stage of good intentions. The voice of Mr. Fisher in the British Parliament the other day travelled clear and strong and inspiring along the depressed ranks of the teachers, like the voice of a hero on the battle-fields of old. He may retain his vigour although he is breathing the air of office, and continue, like the leviathan, "to churn the blackness hoary." But every one around Whitehall has his answer ready to the question asked by Job : "Canst thou take out leviathan with a hook ? And bind him for thy maidens ?"—"Certainly ! There is no difficulty, if you give me red-tape."

The health of the mind is not on the same level in public estimation as the health of the body. Education is not held to be an indispensable condition of national well-being as sanitation is. It is one of the good things which can be postponed on occasion, or even done without beyond the bare minimum, if a community can plead poverty or high taxes. The Public Health authorities

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command, the Educational authorities plead —when they have sufficient courage. The very first war economy in some localities was at the expense of the education of the children ; and the council of one large city exposed its intelligence, soon after the war began, by withdrawing a grant of fifty pounds which it had made for a few years previously to the School of Social Studies.

But to recur to the main question. Assuming that continuation schools are established, and that more education of a vocational and technical character will be given, especially now that something of the incalculable practical significance of the natural sciences has been at last realized, “What more ?” and “What then ?” We know that a nation may prosper exceedingly in the things to which a national system of education of this kind can contribute and yet be doomed to stand before the world as the greatest blunderer and criminal in its whole history. If education has had a primary place amongst the forces which have made Germany great, it is its education also which has perverted its spirit, corrupted and enslaved its soul,

and made it the concern of civilization either to destroy this people or to change its desires and its will. The educational projects which are discussed and advocated in the Press and on the platform are mainly of one kind. To carry them out were to follow the example of Germany in the things in which she is strong. Are there any plans for avoiding the example of Germany in those things which are leading her to her doom ? Germany, as we have shown, has had an educational purpose, and it has systematized all her agencies ; she has shaped the mind of the nation and shaped it ill. For her purpose was wrong. What, then, is the right purpose ? What goal shall *we* seek ?

There will be grave reluctance on the part of the British people to setting up any such purpose. It is one matter, it may be said, to control the machinery of education for industrial and commercial purposes ; it is another matter for the State to presume to control the souls of its citizens by means of its educational schemes. Character is complex, the forces of the moral world are many

and they are little understood. It is better to let character grow, as at present, rather than meddle with it by means of any coarse, general scheme. It is wise "to doubt our capacity to choose a good national ideal ; and it is right to dread the consequences of choosing a bad one more than the consequences of being without any ideal at all." Besides, we are not accustomed as a nation to map out our future : we have always preferred in the past to deal with circumstances as they arise. And we have done not badly. No doubt our ways may appear to a German precisian to be contemptibly haphazard and disorderly and wasteful. They *are* haphazard. They are also costly, and, at times, exceedingly risky. But if our ways are illogical, they are not unreasonable. If they have been methodless, they have not been ruinous or disgracefully evil and stupid—as their opposite is proving to be. If we have only muddled along, groping our way in the erratic and hazardous fashion of sheer empiricism, we have nevertheless somehow gathered more gear than the Germans themselves ; and we have built an Empire which is not only

large and strong, but also free and loyal and not unhappy—possibly, with all its defects, the most wonderful structure in the history of man.

But there are weightier considerations which make us hesitate to adopt anything at all analogous to the German scheme of predestinating a nation by means of its educational agencies. We do not want to be fashioned on the likeness of the German people. We are not prepared to magnify the State as they have done—if, indeed, to annul its moral obligations be to magnify it. We are not willing to be made mere “instruments of its advancement.” We can be loyal to our country without having our individuality manipulated in the schools and colleges by the Government, and without being all our lives long subject to its discipline. Least of all shall we suffer the last indignity and gravest of all wrongs—namely, that of having our minds shaped by “a power not ourselves,” and our wills thereby subdued to purposes not truly our own. For in such a case nothing can really be our own. He has neither possessions nor rights who

does not own himself. Man used as means is no longer man. He is a chattel. To employ education for the formation of the soul for any purpose other than its own direct good is to pervert the uses of education. Its value and end is to emancipate, not to enslave. Education is the condition of freedom, as freedom is the condition of all the virtues.

We can appeal to results in this matter of individual character just as we have done in that of Empire-building. It is better to refrain from describing the results achieved by the German method, for it is not possible to call them admirable. The soul of the German people has been so deformed by the pressure of discipline and dogmas that they know no better than to dedicate their attainments and such liberty as remains to them to the sordid service of a shallow and limited moral end. For their "highest" is "the advancement of a State" which recognizes for itself no code of honour, and their "All-highest," who is the State, is William the Second. No kind or amount of attainment can compensate for this perversion. "Every

schoolboy in Germany procures himself a *Weltanschauung*, a World-point-of-view, with his first razor, and can talk your head off about religion or humanity, or art or World-power, long before he can be old enough to know what the words mean." But the British product is somehow preferable. It is difficult to condemn British school education, or to despair of the future of the Empire, if we observe, not merely the children of the well-to-do in the cricket-fields, but those of the working-men as they pour out of the elementary school into their shamefully small play-grounds—filled with more energy than they can control and more happiness than they know what to do with. "In Germany, even before the War, there was an increasing number of suicides amongst timid types of children in all classes of society." British boys and girls do not commit suicide.

Such are the arguments employed in excuse of the apparently chaotic character of our national education, and in defence of the limited regard for reflective research in matters of character.

But the arguments are unsound. The

premises on which they rest are not true. Our education, where it has been successful—that is, in the schools—has not been haphazard. It has been governed by a purpose. The ideal by which it has been guided has not been placarded across the public consciousness after the German fashion; nevertheless, it cannot be described as “subconscious,” or “unconscious,” or even “intuitive,” if these words are meant (as usual) to exclude theory and the use of the processes of thought and reasoning. Hence it does not follow that, in contemplating educational reforms, we can let the education of character go unguided and uncared for, while we confine our attention to those subjects which will contribute to our material prosperity. Our economic well-being is the one matter which, whether in peace or war, we never forget or undervalue, and is the safest of all our national interests—provided only it is not hindered or nullified by national defects which are not commonly associated with economic inefficiency. The nation’s true mettle, its place and destiny and value for the world, will find the trial come from quite another quarter.

II. EDUCATION AT SCHOOL AND IN THE TRADE

A more true rendering of the educational situation, with its risks and possibilities, must be attempted. First, then, while successful, so far as it goes, our education goes only a little way, and even in our present ardour for reform it is not proposed to carry it far. We assume that in the case of all save the few who are to be gentlemen of leisure, economic conditions preclude that possibility. The child of poor parents must begin to earn his livelihood and the youth whose parents have more means must enter the office or learn his profession. *We acquiesce in the total suspension at a very early age of all deliberate and sustained and systematic efforts at further enlightening his mind or forming his character.* These things, speaking broadly, are left at the mercy of the calling to which the youth is committed.

No one can deny the educative value of an honest calling. The tailor's or shoemaker's workshop, where it is small, where master and man work side by side, where each worker produces an article from begin-

ning to end, leaving upon it stamped indelibly and unmistakably the features of his own character, can be the happy home of art and the school of virtue. Estimated in terms which are *human*, there are few happier or more beautiful places in the world.

But it is obvious that the conditions of modern industry have made these things very difficult. The large works are not educational institutions or schools of art or of gentleness as the little workshops were ; and the relations between the employers and the employed are not, from any point of view, either creditable or profitable to either side. The business men and the workmen are responsible between them for the greatest social muddle, and for the meanest and the most stupid moral relations. And they are exposing the British people to the gravest national danger in the future. “Complacent assurance as to our social solidarity” is not any longer possible even for the foolish. Wise men are anxious. “The horizon seems to be composed of lowering and threatening clouds. There was an ugly temper abroad before the outbreak of the war,” and such

peace as has been maintained during the war has been effected by methods of compromise ; and the compromise is temporary. In fact, there is not peace ; there are only suspended hostilities. The problem is not solved : it has been put aside “ till the war is ended.” And it is like the problem of the Sphinx, *to be solved on pain of death.*

These facts show that the education which has thus come in the wake of modern industrialism, if valued in terms of individual character and social well-being and security, is a disastrous failure. It is narrow in range and it is wrong in kind. It is not ruled by “the handsome passions,” and the wisdom which it seeks is not high. It does not secure happiness nor promote virtue. Too often it distorts as well as starves the souls of men. “The fundamental truth in modern life, as I analyse it,” says President Wilson, “is a profound ignorance. I am not one of those who challenge the promoters of special interests on the ground that they are malevolent, that they are bad men ; I challenge their leadership on the ground that they are ignorant men, that when you have absorbed

yourself in a business through half your life, you have no other point of view than the point of view of that business, and that, therefore, you are disqualified by ignorance from giving counsel as to common interests.

. . . If you immerse a man in a given undertaking, no matter how big that undertaking is, and keep him immersed for half a lifetime, you can't expect him to see any horizon ; you can't get him to see life steadily or see it whole."

There is no solution of these difficulties except by a change of national temper, and there is no way of bringing that change about except by rescuing education from the clutches of industrialism. We must have a purpose. We must revert to the principal and main purpose which, in the British homes and in the schools, has fashioned young lives whose mettle has been tried hard by their country in its time of need, and has not been found wanting. And we must make it clear, hold it consciously, and carry it out resolutely.

That purpose is in one respect opposite to that of Germany, which has treated its

youth as State-fodder; for its essence is that in all stages of education, from the lowest to the highest, the individual himself shall be the *sole end of the process*, and that ulterior considerations should have no more place in our schemes than they have in the mind of the mother when she suckles her infant at her breast. There is only one kind of school which gains a sensible man's entire trust—it is that in which the lessons, the games, the societies, the whole training, whether vocational or other, is meant to terminate and reach its final goal in the boys and girls themselves. The child is taught for his own sake, not in order that he may "promote the efficiency of the State"—that is the German conception; not for the sake of industrial efficiency—that is the conception of men tempted to regard the children of the workers as industrial pabulum.

It is difficult to maintain the purity of the educational motive as the boys and girls grow up. At first their uselessness, whether for economic or State purposes, helps to protect them. Later on, the relative value of educational ends is not so easily discerned,

and an unfortunate and entirely unnecessary conflict is allowed to emerge between the livelihood and the life. For vocational training, too, can and always ought to awaken the powers, form the taste, strengthen the character, and prepare the way for a life that is upright and honourable, on which not only the livelihood follows with a security that very rarely fails, but something of that nobility of bearing and moral worth which even parents who have made a mess of their own lives, *and know it*, not seldom pathetically desire for their children.

III. THE SOLE END OF EDUCATION—THE CITIZEN HIMSELF

To say that this *moral* education is the only education that should ever be given, whether in the schools or afterwards, would appear to be extravagant. It is the simple truth. *Neither State nor Church, nor teacher, nor parent, nor any other authority, has any right to form a people's mind or tamper with its personality, except for the people's good.* This is fundamental. In the last resort there is only one justification for the pressure

of discipline or of dogma, or for any other kind of compulsion—we may fashion to virtue, constrain to duty, “force to be free.” The State may do this for its citizens. According to Plato, it is its sole business. The end of the State is the citizen ; and the State which exists for the sake of its citizens is safe in their hands. It will find that its citizens will in turn be responsible for its good and dedicated to its well-being.

States may even do this for one another : that is to say, they may escape from the moral confusion into which Germany has fallen, and respect one another’s “personality.” For this is the essence of morality, public and private, national and international, and the very perfection of behaviour—“to treat humanity,” wherever it is found, in white or coloured, civilized or uncivilized, wise or foolish, good or evil, “always as end and never as mere means.”

But, it will be asked, how can it be reasonably said that the only education permissible is moral education ? What of the arts and of religion, and of the whole series of crafts and industries, trades and professions ?

The question proceeds on a false assumption, committing the error which was exposed at the outset : it assumes that morality is a separate province or an exclusive aspect of life. But morality *is* religion operative, the highest incarnating itself in deeds, the process of transmuting natural circumstance into spiritual privilege. It is divine service. All man's ultimate ideals are adjectives of one another ; the good is beautiful and the beautiful is good, and they are both true. Art and morality are not at war ; and as to the crafts and industries, they are moral opportunities, a chance of rendering a service which is free.

The question also implies that moral education must be theoretic and doctrinal rather than practical, conveyed by lessons and lectures rather than by the doing of the things which are right. But the way *to* morality, which moral education ought to be, as well as morality itself, *is* practice. *Morality is the process of extracting from the station which we occupy, and the events which happen to us, the highest value that is implicit in them.* The natural environment, nature itself, is

a musical instrument, whose discords and harmonies depend on the player's touch. And it is never out of tune if the touch be true enough. Morality is not possible except "in the stream of life" and under the stress of events. "The harper," says Aristotle, "is not made otherwise than by harping, nor the just man otherwise than by the doing of just deeds."

Because moral education must be in close relation to practice, and illumined by the experience of the pupil himself, *theoretic* ethical instruction in schools is apt to be futile. The value of talking about morality to boys and girls is doubtful. Even "the moral" of stories meant to illustrate the virtues should not be allowed to obtrude. There is a reticence and reserve about the matters of the inner life which is more natural to the British people than to others, and it should not be lightly valued. Our boys and girls are not coarse of fibre, and they rarely fail to understand the meaning of silence. The unpremeditated flash of approval or disapproval, the happy look in the mother's or father's face when a gentle

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deed is done, some inevitable and unpurposed tenderness in the teacher's voice as he reproves or commends, has indefinitely higher worth than systematic lessons. These things are close to facts and practice. They indicate the high price which is set on deeds of courage, or truthfulness, or kindness—such deeds as the child can understand. And, whether it be in the home or in the school, the moral education that seems thus to spring at the touch of circumstance from the character of the parent or teacher, like fire from flint, and which implies a steadfast attitude of the soul, a compelling habit of admiring what is morally fair and of reverencing what is morally noble, is as nearly perfect as anything human can well be. Moreover, it is a way of giving instruction which can be followed *always*. Indeed, it is this purpose which informs all that the good teacher does. He may be teaching the multiplication table or the paradigm of a Greek verb, or his instruction may be what we call "vocational" or "technical," but his permanent care is, by any or all of these means, to liberate the possibilities of character in his pupils.

But it must not be inferred, because moral theory should have little place in the schools, that it should have little place in the education which follows. This were a cardinal error. A time comes when the pupil can participate in the ethical purpose of his teacher, and when that purpose must be pursued *consciously* by both alike. As life goes on, especially if it grows in worth, to distil the ethical meaning of facts and events becomes more and more clearly man's highest duty and most precious privilege. For it is not merely the working-man who "does not know how to spend his high wages": there are very poor people among the very rich, because the human values latent in their wealth are beyond their reach. They are not educated to the level of their opportunities: they have not the alchemy in their character which can extract their uses. The pictures on the walls of their palaces, the literature on their shelves, mean no more to them than the mountains of gold could mean to the Australian aborigines.

It is by no means true that moral practice is independent of moral theory, or that

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moral progress can come without knowing the truth—the highly complex and intricate truths of moral matters. The divorce of conduct from knowledge or of the will from the intelligence is foolish and very mischievous. It is the fashion for the moment to esteem the “intuitions” and “feelings” more highly than thought and to trust to them in matters of conduct rather than to “reason and its processes.” It is not recognized that the moral “intuitions” of to-day were doubtful truths yesterday—hard to grasp and harder to believe, while the day before they were the dreams of unpractical visionaries. What we attribute to the feelings and call “instinctive” is the wisdom of the past become traditional, and on that account instilled into us and assimilated by us as we grow. We do not realize that every shred of that wisdom has cost thought as well as volition, exercised the reasoning powers as well as the emotions. It is a dangerous doctrine that morality is not a matter which men need think about or try to understand. We recognize in part the labour which it has cost mankind to

change the hunger-haunted nakedness of the lake-dweller into the wealthy man's command of the wide world's commodities. We have not trusted the affairs of the world of economics to "the heart" rather than the head. Or is it in its sleep that mankind has established the institutions, constructed the social relations, discovered the truths that have changed the crude and cruel passions of the cave-man into the spirit which wears righteousness as a robe and intelligence as a diadem, which is sensitive to the beauty and the meaning of the world and devoted to its good? Is it the thoughtless who have led the world to betterment? Or are not the paths of spiritual progress stained with the blood of the pilgrims?

No one can estimate the loss which modern civilization has suffered from the low value which has been set upon the free search for truth in moral matters and the absence of enterprise in this realm of the spirit. There is prejudice against such enterprise. We attribute the moral bankruptcy of Germany to its "*intellectualism*." "No one," we are told, "can accuse the Germans as a nation

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of having neglected the cultivation of the intellect : it is proved to demonstration that they have not been equally regardful of training the character.”¹

The diagnosis is characteristic, and it is false. The bankruptcy of Germany is due *not* to intellectualism, but to *ignorance*. And it is an error to say that “the Germans have not been regardful of training the character.” They have trained character, as is well known, with an assiduity and resoluteness and systematic thoroughness to which there is no parallel. But they have done it to a wrong purpose ; and their purpose was wrong because of their ignorance. The falsity of their educational end and their blundering ignorance of the nature of man, of the nature of the State, of the mutual rights and obligations of the State and its citizens, and of morality itself, are exposed in the disasters which are now flowing from them. They are bad “psychologists,” as all the nations of the world know ; they are worse philosophers and moralists.

Now, why is it that we attribute their

¹ *The Hibbert Journal*, July, 1916, p. 719.

error to “intellectualism”? We should not think of calling an analogous misinterpretation and wrong use of the forces of nature by that name. We should call it ignorance, we should attribute it to lack of inquiry and to low regard for truth in the domain of nature; and we should seek for remedy in research. It is because we ourselves undervalue research in the domain of morals. There are more systematic students of mathematics than of morals in the British islands, and there is more confusion about moral values, which are alone the ultimate values, than there is about plants and chemicals, or pounds and pennies. No doubt knowledge is not the *only* condition of individual or national well-being, any more than an organism needs nothing but brains; but knowledge is indispensable all the same. No one can be good by virtue of ignorance; and there is no ignorance so costly for a nation as ignorance of the conditions of moral well-being.

The right to moral education is the supreme right of the citizen, and to accord the means to this education is the supreme duty of the State.

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This is, above all other things, the lesson we should learn from Germany—the risks of moral ignorance and stupidity. Who doubts that its doom is due to its moral confusion? Or that the confusion is very deep and general amongst learned and unlearned alike? It is difficult to determine what policy could show less insight than that of using man as means, as the German State has done, unless it be that of setting up a State, conceived in terms of physical force, as possessing an unqualified and unconditional right to his services and his life. Man is never means, not even when he is coerced to a duty which he does not recognize—for the rights of an ignorant conscience are limited. Man can bow his soul (and prosper) only to the categorical imperatives of the moral law; and States themselves can prosper on no other terms. There is no law which is absolutely binding, except the law of freedom; neither is there any other law of life for either men or nations. And the State cannot claim service, except it be itself in the service of a still higher authority—the authority which is

rooted in the righteousness that is “like the everlasting mountains.”

But, on the other hand, provided that a State’s authority is rooted in righteousness, provided that in its dealings with its citizens it be itself a “suppliant for the control” of the Law of Duty, there is then no limit to its authority, and none is desirable. Nor is any service or sacrifice stinted by the citizens of such a State : their service of it is freedom and joy, and their one way to self-respect. “It is not true,” says one who has bled for England, “that what nerves men to fight is always, or even generally, the desire to assert the power of the country to which they belong against that of the country to which they do not.” To the men who fifty yards from one another “freeze and starve and sweat in the same mud and rain and heat, who look out on the same shattered villages and unploughed fields, and hunger with the same passion for the return of peace, there must be some higher sanction for their actions than the mere interests of their own country. Both life and death were insupportable if there were not. The

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national impulse which creates the national armies springs from the feeling that a country is identified with certain principles whose claims are absolute. They do not fight because the State chose that they should. The State fights because they chose that it should. They do not fight to protect England and France. They fight to prevent England and France ceasing to be England and France, as they would if Englishmen and Frenchmen did not fight when their consciences told them to do so. They fight not that their country may exist, but because it would be better that it should cease to exist than lose its soul for the sake of existing.”¹

Such views as these are held in Germany to be absurdly antiquated, and those who teach them as “ guilty of an unpardonable confusion of thought. All ethical considerations are alien to the State, and the State must, therefore, resolutely keep them at arm’s length.” “ If the war has done no more than awake the German people out of

¹ “ Democracy or Defeat,” by a “ W.E.A. Soldier,” *Welsh Outlook*, January, 1917.

love's young dream—that is, out of its reliance on the goodwill and honest dealing of peoples and States, it will have done us a great service.”¹ Germany believes this preposterous doctrine as to the nature of the State; she has endeavoured to put it into practice, and is finding that her hypotheses will not work. She has obeyed the command to “think in terms of power” (*macht-politischen denken*) and turned her soul away from her old idealisms. She has been devoting her mind to other matters than morality, dedicating her intellectual resources to the discovery and the use of the forces which make for economic and military power. And the consequences are both obvious and inevitable. Knowledge, as usual, has proved to be power. Germany would be to-day the envy of the nations and the marvel of human history if human well-being could be reckoned in her gross terms. As things are, she is their warning. Her ignorance concerning the real conditions of national strength, her ignorance of the things which

¹ Dr. Kerschensteiner, quoted in *The Round Table*, March, 1917, p. 272.

are best worth knowing and having—the things which have absolute worth in themselves and give their worth, as Aristotle says, to all other ends—has led her to deal with her citizens in educating them, and to endeavour to live amongst her neighbouring States, in a way and upon conditions that are self-destructive.

This, then, is the one supreme truth which is being taught the world : *That which occupies the mind enters into the conduct, just as that which is near the heart invades the intelligence ; and what enters into conduct fashions fate.* It is not safe in educating citizens to think of nothing but industrial and commercial success and to forget morality. Germany has done so. Her delight has not been in the law of the Lord. She has meditated therein neither day nor night. And she shall not be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season. Her leaf shall wither, and unless she changes her soul nought that she doeth shall prosper. She has issued a challenge to the nature of things, which is moral ; and she is in process of being worsted in the fight.

IV. THE NATION'S APPEAL TO THE UNIVERSITIES

Now, the explicitness with which Germany has repudiated moral obligations on the part of the State, the blatancy with which it has declared its belief in mere power, the elaborate perfection of its schemes for subjecting the souls of its citizens to its own coarse ends, the obvious danger in which the world stood from Germany's arrogance—all these things taken together have made it relatively easy to discover its errors and to rally the forces of civilization against its purposes. The errors of an enemy are usually plain. It is our own which are difficult to detect, especially if they are shared by our neighbours and have fashioned the traditions and habits of our times, and become our "intuitive beliefs." Moreover, the British people is not given to looking at its own face in the mirror. It is of all peoples the least "reflective." Hence, if we are told that "the enemy we are fighting is not anything so transitory or unstable as modern Germany, but a spirit which lies in wait for

every nation ; that though that spirit is rooted in the historical tradition of Prussia, what makes it dangerous is not that it is alien but that it is horribly congenial to almost the whole modern world," we can scarcely understand what is meant. When the same powerful writer adds "that the temper of German imperialism is the temper of modern industrialism," and "that the moral atmosphere which has fed the spirit in Prussia, till it swelled from a barbarous peculiarity into a triumphant philosophy of empire, has been imported into Germany largely from England direct, partly through the mediation of America,"¹ we are hardly willing to listen further.

Possibly the best hope of the times is to be found in the fact that in some quarters, by some men, the philosophy of life implied in industrialism is being questioned. The war has brought into relief other aims than those with which industrialism has steeped and stained its spirit. A startling light has been thrown upon our ethical and even our

¹ "Democracy or Defeat," by a "W.E.A. Soldier," in the *Welsh Outlook*.

theological creeds. We have seen young men, in their hundreds of thousands, go forth to prove that it is better to die for some things than it is to live for some others. The selfishness of the competitive materialism of the customary economic world has little place in the fields of France. It is not that there rates are cut or production limited : that the risks are rolled on the next man, as the seller rolls the rise of prices on the next buyer ; that the country's need is converted into a chance of private gain ; or that operations are suspended till the spoil is divided between the men and their managers, and the stronger force carries away the larger share. It is not there that salvation is sought by allowing another to die in one's stead.

And we are beginning to ask whether such ways of life and creeds as are beneath the level of the morality and religion of war can be good enough for peace. Or, to put the same truth in the opposite way, we are beginning to reflect whether it be not possible to introduce into our civil ways of life something of the influences which have clothed

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the men on the fields of battle with imperishable spiritual splendour ; and reflected that splendour back on many a quiet hearth in very quiet parts of our vast empire, where the mothers have loved their sons too wisely and too well not to be willing that they should " follow the gleam."

Why should the economic life of a people capable of this moral heroism be squalid and its economic spirit that of the moral slums ? Is it not possible that the purpose which is supreme and dominant in war, and has in it sufficient potency to convert the horrors of the battle-field into the service of a sacred cause, might let in some clean light and pure air into the board-rooms of industrial directors and dissipate something of the smoke of the factories ?

Supposing the experiment were tried of putting our lives in times of peace at the service of the same sacred cause ; supposing the well-being of our country—not as a brute State that knows no law save its own will to aggression, but as the living repository of our whole spiritual inheritance in literature and art and all the sciences, as the security

of our economic interests and the protection of the hearth and of all the institutions of freedom and happiness, and as the principle of loyalty and order throughout the whole —supposing the well-being of a State conceived in that way stood in the background of our industrial enterprise, would they also not gain a new value, and all the men engaged upon them move and live thereby on a higher and happier plane ? And would they lose one jot of their economic efficiency ? Or would not the sense of a common service, whether as employers or as employed, substitute for the material and spiritual waste which conflict and suspicion and animosity bring, the sense of comradeship and the spirit of help which is gain all the way, for body and soul, citizen and State ?

These are the questions that are being asked now in many ways and on many hands, both in England and in France. If, on the whole, what still occupies the foreground of ordinary thought on education and fills many columns of the popular Press, is either the industrial use of natural science or the rival claims of technical subjects and the

humanities ; and if the late British Government (leading when pushed and obedient to the forces of mediocrity, after the manner of Governments) has appointed committees to consider the sciences as instruments of producing goods and modern languages as means of selling them, as if it had no concern with men but only with money, still there is evidence that a deliberate national purpose of another kind is being slowly formed : the purpose—namely, so to educate the British people as to make it more fully and more intelligently aware of the unspeakable privileges and obligations of their citizenship.

One of the most significant and promising movements towards this end is that joint enterprise of the English and Welsh universities and the English and Welsh working man which is called “The Workers’ Educational Association.” So far the movement has not prospered in Scotland ; the workers suspect the universities of being “capitalistic institutions,” and the richer industrialists fear they are socialistic ! And the Scottish national temper is apt to be thorough. Compared with the magnitude of

its undertaking, the W.E.A. is small ; but it is not possible to witness the soundness of its aim, the practical sagacity of its methods, and the enthusiasm which it is eliciting, without believing that once more “there is lighted such a candle in England as shall not be put out.” Its purpose is towards the whole people. Recognizing, as is natural, the vital importance of vocational and professional training, it still knows “the use of humane education, even to miners and engineers and weavers,” and affirms that industrial training “ought to be *secondary* to the liberal education that gives health and vigour to the body, knowledge and wisdom to the mind.”¹ Its aim is the aim of all true reformers, said William Temple, its president, “to bring a genuine human life within the reach of every citizen.”

But the main significance of this enterprise will be found in its recoil upon the universities themselves. The education of the working man at the industrial centres by means of tutorial classes is the most wholesome task

¹ *What Labour Wants*, by J. M. Mactavish, Secretary to the W.E.A.

to which they have put their hands in modern times, and in the performance of it they will henceforth interpret their functions more generously and prove a new and much greater power in the national life. The universities, and more especially the older English universities, will be led to reform themselves in the direction of serving citizenship more directly *and much more widely*.

It is claimed that in the great public schools and universities no “divorce exists between our scheme of education and our political ideal.” On the contrary, the youths subjected to their peculiar discipline and impressed with their $\wp\theta\sigma$ s pass into the service of the Empire at home and in distant parts bearing with them the spirit of liberty and individuality, and they administer and rule with such strength and justice and good sense and devotion as to go far to account for the freedom and the loyalty of the peoples they govern and the secure stability of the British Commonwealth.

This is a great claim and it is valid. But the test is narrow, while the possible imperial uses of the universities are very wide. The

men who pass from the universities into the higher civil services are relatively few in number, and they are the *élite*; and if Oxford and Cambridge cater superbly for these, and for all others of their *alumni* who bring with them the promise of eminence in any of the arts or of the sciences, there are others committed to their charge whom they might serve better and help more. The large majority of the undergraduates are brought up in the great public schools, and are the sons of well-to-do parents. They enter the older universities when about nineteen years of age, healthy in body, wholesome in mind, and sound in character. Some of them lack the ability, more of them lack the ambition or the temperament which produces the scholar or the scientific man. They bring with them no store of learning of any sort; they have not been in contact with the forces which make or unmake nations. They were too young. They have not felt the power of ideas. After a happy three years, spent under the genial guidance and the light hand of the college tutor, and the sterner discipline of their comrades on

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the river and the fields of play, they go forth into their world, and in the natural course of things take upon themselves the numerous and varied responsibilities of citizenship. More of these responsibilities are laid upon them than upon the quiet scholars whom they have left behind. They become land-owners, manufacturers, traders ; they come into intimate touch with the lives of men ; they have tenants to deal with, workmen to employ and rule, the nation's commerce to sustain and guide, and the civil institutions of the community to maintain in their use and strength.

What do the colleges do for them in the way of preparing them for these responsibilities ? They continue the smattering in the classics or mathematics, or rudimentary science, just as if the calls of citizenship were never to fall upon their ears. That the young men leave their university ignorant of the details of civic institutions and of local administration is relatively a small matter. But they are not aware of the magnitude of their civic inheritance, and they are not able to enter into possession of the

educated man's portion of it. They have not felt the power of their country's literature, nor have they been intoxicated with any one of the fine arts. They have read in the *Republic* of Plato and *Politics* of Aristotle, but they do not know their own times ; they have not felt that the contrast between the Civic State of Athens or Sparta and the vast tumultuous Modern Empire is as the contrast between the old battlefields where the arrows flew or the shields rang and the fields of carnage on the Marne and the Somme ; while the economics of modern industrialism mean as little for them as the social arrangements of the book of Leviticus. They are unaware of the long toil of good men in the slow service of the invisible issues of the ethical world, and know nothing of the making of a nation's mind. They do not understand what civilization has cost, and they have never tried to measure their debt to their people. They have never asked what customs, what manners, what morals, what religion, what language, even, or what shred of those things which make men human they would possess had they not

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been nursed on their country's knees and "suckled its breasts."

The universities should enlighten them. They should train these men—these "ordinary" undergraduates who are capable of so much and are helped so little—with a direct view to citizenship, with even such a direct view as they now train men for the learned professions. It is in the power especially of the older universities to widen the outlook of the undergraduates now so elegantly neglected, to put them in the way of enriching their lives, of deepening their sense of gratitude to their country, and of making them less prejudiced, more happy and much more efficient in its service.

And this reform need not bring the least detriment to the scholarly and scientific purposes now pursued so prosperously by the universities, nor lower in the least their ardour for research. That were a sacrifice not lightly to be made. But side by side with their labour in the fields of science and advanced scholarship it should not be difficult to devise and establish means of educating these other good citizens in a more purposeful

way than at present. The requirements for a pass degree in citizenship are, in the main, as obvious as those for a degree in medicine and theology. The course for the degree would be inadequate to its subject, just as these are ; but it would not be more inadequate, nor of less social utility. And it would not be less attractive and informing.

Is it presumption to offer a rough sketch of a scheme of study suitable for this purpose ?

All undergraduates reading for the pass degree in citizenship should be required to attend through one academical year, courses of instruction in the following subjects :—

First Year.—(a) *A course of lectures in English literature.* The objects of the course would not be those of technical or minute scholarship. Its purpose is to introduce the undergraduate to the master minds in prose and poetry and to enable him to feel their power. Oxford knows from its professors of poetry and from others what such lectures may signify ; and the Scottish universities have learnt from John Nichol and Masson, Bradley and Saintsbury and their successors,

something of the value of such a study both in the life of the student at college and afterwards.

(b) *A course of lectures of the same broad character in any other literature, ancient or modern.* Once more the emphasis would not fall upon the niceties of scholarship, valuable as these may be ; for it is the *pass* man who is in question. The undergraduate, whether he read Greek or Latin, French, German, Spanish, Italian, or Russian, would be guided in the same way to knowledge of the masters, and he would read widely in them for himself.

Some of the undergraduates might be expected to be inspired with the ambition of the scholar and should pass into the honours school. The others, it is easy to believe, would read more, and know better what to read, ever after.

Second Year.—(a) A course of instruction in English or, rather, British history. It would deal slightly with things long ago and more and more fully on the way down to the events of the present. Its purpose would be to help the student to witness the growth of national custom, of moral and

religious opinion, and of the institutions in which these embody themselves; and to recognize in some degree how great a fact the British Commonwealth is and what it has cost to found it.

(b) *A course of instruction by class lectures and laboratory experiment in any science.* Its object would be to help the undergraduate to appreciate the method and catch something of the spirit of scientific inquiry and to know the uses and the joy of labour in the natural field.

Third Year.—The courses of instruction should concentrate directly on citizenship and deal :

(a) *With economics.*

(b) *With the ethics of individual and social life.* The purposes of these courses would be to enable the undergraduate to recognize and, so far as possible, to understand the nature and to estimate the value of the economic and moral forces that conflict and combine in modern life; to realize the intimacy and multiplicity of the relations and the limits and grounds of the mutual rights and claims of the modern citizen and

modern State ; and to lift him out of the reach of the narrowing influences and prejudices which cling so easily to the station in life which he happens to occupy.

Can it be doubted that were the older universities to follow such a scheme for educating the ordinary undergraduate—with whom alone we are at present concerned—his three years at college would be less empty, his after-life fuller, and the debt of the British people to its highest institutions of learning much deepened ?

But there are two other directions in which the universities might increase their power and greatly enhance their value to the British Commonwealth.

(a) They have undertaken to help the working man towards knowledge, and to foster within him the spirit of an enlightened citizenship. They should strengthen the assault upon the narrowness and hardship of the outlook of the working classes, and the assault should be much more general. The universities should feel more deeply their responsibility for the continued and advanced education of adult men and women. They

should be guardians of the adult mind. No town of ten or fifteen thousand inhabitants should be without a tutorial class every winter on some one subject bearing not too remotely on good citizenship. At every centre of national life the pulse of the spirit of the university should be felt and known to beat—the spirit that values and seeks for truth, and thereby makes life larger and more free.

(b) Besides the workers there are the employers and managers of labour. These men, too, are, *as a rule*, cramped by their industries, and not seldom the victims of ignorance and of hard prejudice. They are, as a class, not much more liberally educated than the workers ; they are not less responsible for the barbaric relations which now prevail in the economic world ; and, in any case, their ignorance and distortion of mind is a graver danger to the community. Their education should not stop, in so far as it is humane and liberal, when they leave the school and enter the office or engineering shop. At sixteen or eighteen years of age it is not possible for them to have felt the

power of intelligence and justice in the affairs of men. They are not treated well in this respect by their parents. It should be recognized as a grave injustice and as a social disadvantage—as “bad form”—for the sons of the well-to-do not to have known what university life can mean, and not to have learnt to set a high and intelligent value on humane letters and the sciences both of man and of nature. And it is a wrong to the State. We do not wisely in committing hundreds and thousands of workers in the great centres of industry to the charge of ill-educated men. The service which such men are rendering to their country by anticipating and meeting its economic wants is incalculably great. They should receive their reward : the spirit of citizenship should be awakened and fostered within them by means of a more generous education, so that their service shall be on a better level, and be to them what his profession is to the minister of religion; or the doctor, or the man of learning and science, a thing to live *for* and not merely to live *by*.

It is time that the universities throughout the Empire should widen their aims and be less niggard in the expenditure of the civic virtue that is latent in them. They are national institutions, they have national obligations, and their obligations are their opportunities. Their students should be many times as numerous as they are at present. They have no right to be cloistered and to minister only to the few. Wales, it is believed, is on the way to demand to be taxed for the purposes of higher learning, and about to set an example to the Empire of abolishing university fees and making college education free.¹ It is to be hoped that its example may prove contagious, especially in the great centres of industry such as Leeds and Sheffield, Birmingham and Newcastle, Bristol and Liverpool and Manchester.

It is not to be denied that the responsibility for the moral education of the people lies first of all upon the Churches. But when

¹ This hope was not entirely realized. The Welsh County Councils made generous grants to the University: but the change in the value of money prevented the abolition of fees.—ED.

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social reformers seek for agencies which shall foster and not frustrate the spirit of scientific and undogmatic inquiry into the matters of the spirit, or which shall, in these times of economic danger, moderate the antagonisms and raise the level of the aims of capital and labour, it is not to the Churches that they look. It is to the universities. From them must flow those influences which shall form the mind of the people to the purposes of a harmonious, peaceful, secure, progressive, happy and noble citizenship.

The Dignity of Human Nature

Notes of an ADDRESS given to the
Wounded Soldiers in LADY ASTOR'S
HOSPITAL, CLIVEDEN, TAPLOW, on a
SUNDAY EVENING, June, 1917.¹

I WAS looking for something to say that would let me respect myself and leave untarnished my reverence for what you have done and suffered, when I came across the following sentences in the writings of a very wise and most delightful man (R. L. S.) :

“ It is a commonplace that we cannot answer for ourselves before we have been tried. . . . But it is not so common a reflection, and surely more consoling, that we usually find ourselves a great deal better

¹ No extended report of this address exists. I have thought it worth while to print the manuscript notes from which the address was delivered, just as they stand.—ED.

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and braver than we thought."—(*An Inland Voyage.*)

I think all this is quite true. But I have not had much experience of dangers, nor looked Death in the eyes more than once or twice ; and I am speaking to many who have found him daily very near and been tried to the uttermost.

I wonder if it is true, as I believe it is, that it would have saved you trouble if there had been some one before you went out "to put you in good heart about life ; to tell you how dangers are most portentous on a distant sight ; and how the good in a man's spirit will not suffer itself to be overlaid, and rarely or never deserts him in the hour of need."—(R. L. S.)

This is what I want to speak about to-night —I want you to think much of human nature, and to be of good heart.

For the long prose chapter of common life will follow the poetry of living here, amidst the *natural* beauty of the scene and *supernatural* beauty of the gentleness and love of those who have you in their care. You will feel the world common and possibly

cold, and you will need all your courage to go on believing. It is not the heights and peaks, it is the level and dusty plains of the moral world which are trying.

Easier to be splendid on great occasions, than to be great amidst things commonplace.

It is somewhat of *paradox*, isn't it, to ask you to think well of human nature, when the times are so cruel and mad?

And we have a bad tradition. We have been told man is corrupt by nature, more prone to evil than good; shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin.

No good except by some miraculous interference.

And the man of the world corroborates this teaching. When anything specially mean and self-seeking is done, we say, "Human nature."

I want to make a protest: I want it to be believed that the mean, the wrong, the selfish, the cruel is a DISTORTION.

And these times come nearer proving that if man is verily pressed home on himself—stricken hard enough—grand sparks—splendid luminaries ascend into the heavens.

It is psychologists, not philosophers, who call the moral qualities unconscious or subconscious, implying that they have come of themselves. "The good know the right step in the dance of life by feel of foot"—without any pausing or thinking. But that, too, is not true. It is only the foot of the practised dancer that keeps time and place.

No bloodless victory in the moral world.

The victories pay superbly—but that does not mean that they don't cost.

The way on which the strait gate opens, must be trudged, every yard of it.

No duty done by proxy.

The road to rightness a bee-line.

Very narrow—has to be travelled on foot.

But if road to life is steep and stony and goes over difficult places, it is the healthiest travelling and the happiest ever known: and the real pilgrim sings even although he is travel-weary.

But if nobility of life, justice, gentleness, right judgment, spirit of service, joy in labour for great causes, patience, and all these bonnie things do not come of themselves—

Neither do their opposite.

Man not corrupt by nature.

There is *nothing* corrupt by nature. To say that is to blame Him who called nature into being. To blame Him *who invented* the intelligence; who awoke our wants, and desires and imagination, to disturb the stagnancy, widen the horizon, and make broad the outlook of man.

Man not born in sin, any more than the birds and flowers. Ask the mothers whether the babes are not just as innocent as these and far more beautiful.

Look at child life, rampant with energy, and joy, and charm—if it gets decent fair play.

MAN RELEASES the *beauty of nature*—no colour, no music, no beauty, no order, no loveliness, but only a dead, dark, silent universe till you get the *eye, ear, soul*, that can hear. *Soul of man* far the most intricate, far the most potent. Master of Nature's forces. Creator of all worth. And above all, capable of BEAUTY that is SPIRITUAL—a kind of beauty to which Nature has no parallel.

To begin with—there are only *possibilities* of right and wrong.

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But *Man alone* can step from the world of the merely natural to that of the moral world—from finite to infinite, passing to eternal issues. And he passes so naturally, *mind*, the new thing, opens so quietly as to refute the chasm of natural and spiritual. **BESIDES**, man carries the past with him, and brings the natural with him into the spiritual sphere. *Moral life* is the point at which they meet.

Before we can measure these possibilities we must give time for growth.

Have to watch the acorn and to wait.

Acorn requires the soil, and the oak years of vicissitude—storm, sunshine, and the lightning amongst its limbs.

So with mankind. What idea could the lake-dweller have of marvel of written talk—literature, of friendly intercourse, of science and its inventions, and of the *moral values* of purity and kindness, and eternal fidelity, of a love that is clean, and the strength and range and purity of spiritual forces. They *could not anticipate* the grandeur of man's nature.

Even yet the work of evolution not half

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done—"We know not what we shall be" (Browning's "Glories Yet to Come").

Very well! See that you don't injure, or distort, or desecrate. (1) Respect for humanity in self and others. *Never BE MERE* means. Never treat others as mere means. (2) Reconciliation of liberty and service. *Suppliant* for the command of Duty—wanting to be enlisted. (3) End life without having injured man or woman. A man may be weak, foolish, flippant, but let it be said of him that he never BETRAYED a trust, never maimed a life, never broke a heart. (4) *Development of self through service.* There is a NICHE where you can yet fill in your days.